TELOS

NUMBER 129 FALL-WINTER 2004

Special Section on Terrorism:

The Sentencing of Richard Reid

Nietzsche and Hegel on the Politics of Nihilism
Jay Gupta

Islamic Terrorism
Luciano Pellicani

Nazism and Islamic Anti-Semitism
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On Anti-Americanism
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Articles:

On Anti-Utopianism
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On Simmel's Metropolis
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Notes:

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Geoff Boucher

Reply to Boucher
Slavoj Zizek

US: $15 *Canada: $18*

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Subscription Rates

One-year Individual . . . $50.00 One-year Institutional $100.00

Two-years Individual . . . $100.00 Two-years Institutional $200.00

(Foreign Subscribers, including Canadian, add 20%)

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Back Issues available: ns. 13, 17-18, 20-51, 53-126 at $20.00 each ($45.00 for institutions). Foreign orders, add 20%. For the "Table of Contents" of all back issues, see our Web site. All payments must be in U.S. currency. Out of print issues (ns. 1-12, 14-16, 19, 52) can be obtained in microform or facsimile through University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106, US.

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Telos number 129 corresponds to Vol. 35, No. 3-4. ***Telos*** is published in the Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter by Telos Press, Ltd. Periodicals postage paid at New York and additional mailing offices. Send address changes and inquiries to:

Telos

431 E. 12th Street, New York, NY 10009

© 2003, Telos Press Ltd. ISSN 0090-6514

Tel.: # 212-228-6479 Fax: # 212-228-6379 e-mail: telospress@aol.com

Website: www.telospress.com

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Telos pusblishes essays and notes on select topics in philosophy, social theory, and contemporary politics and culture. The journal is particularly interested in treatments of Critical Theory, phenomenology, and other intellectual trends and the light they may shed on issues such as federalism, sovereignty, globalization, religion and politics. Submissions on these topics are welcome. In addition, special sections or issues are being planned on Latin America, post-Communism, Law, and democratization and Islam. All original essays for *Telos* will be refereed. Allow at least three months for editorial evaluation.

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Table of Contents

Introduction 3
Russell Berman

Special Section on Terrorism

The Sentencing of Richard Reid 14

Freedom of the Void:
Hegel and Nietzsche on the Politics of Nihilism:
Toward a Critical Understanding of 9/11 17
Jay Gupta

Islamic Terrorism 41
Luciano Pellicani

From Zeesen to Beirut:
National Socialism and Islamic Anti-Semitism 55
Matthias Küntzel

Anti-Americanism and Ambivalence: Remarks
On an Ideology in Historical Transformation 75
Michael Werz

Articles

On Anti-Utopianism, More or Less 97
Russell Jacoby

Georg Simmel's Metropolis:
Anticipating the Postmodern 139
James Burgey

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Notes

The Antinomies of Zizek.....151
Geoff Boucher

Ethical Socialism? No, Thanks!
Reply to Boucher.....173
Slavoj Zizek

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Introduction

The end of history came to a sudden end in September 2001. The terrorist attacks, fuelled by apocalyptic fantasies, aspired to bring modernity to a conclusion in the fire of a sacred rage. In fact, however, they achieved just the opposite: instead of ending history, they reinvigorated it, establishing a new, defining conflict, reconfiguring friends and enemies, and reawakening memories of values worth defending. Thousands of individual lives came to an end in those attacks. No collective good outweighs those losses, but a process was set in motion that reaffirms, ultimately, the value of individual life over such collectivist obsessions.

What else came to an end was that strange transitional period, the decade of vagueness between November 9, 1989, with the opening of the Berlin Wall, and the September 11 eleven years later, with the fall of the Twin Towers. It was an era of inconsistencies and inconsequentiality: the betrayal of the Shiite uprising in the First Gulf War, Europe's failures in the Balkans, all the moral and political ambiguities of the Clinton years, and even the stale isolationism of the first year of George W. Bush's first administration. It was the dozen years of post-history, the illusion that matters of importance had dissipated. That strange era of complacency came to an abrupt and violent end, but that very statement can only mean that history and politics have recommenced: the history of the democracy movement, and the practical critique of authoritarian regimes, through a politics of conflict.

The substance of the new political conflict comes out clearly in the stark contrasts of the exchange between the so-called shoe bomber and the judge. This document from the sentencing of Richard Reid has been circulating on the internet and is likely to become one of the verbal monuments of the War on Terror. The two sides could hardly find more emblematic spokesmen than these two speakers. The terrorist explicitly pursues destruction, characteristically devoid of any specific political goal: the point was — despite all the *ex post facto* efforts to impute meaning to the destruction — not to force Israel out of the West Bank, or India

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out of Kashmir, or even Spain out of . . . Spain. This was not about American troops in Saudi Arabia, or IMF policies, or even the Kyoto Treaty. Rather, Reid gives expression to the bizarre perception that US policy is driven primarily by anti-Muslim sentiment, and everything else, every particular policy, including support for Israel, is merely a pretext, at best a distantly secondary consequence of this fundamental stance.

The chasm that gapes between the mind of the terrorist and the world of facts is wide indeed. Those in the streets of Europe or the US who, one way or another, support, sympathize, or apologize for the terrorists should read Reid carefully: the image he presents is simply delusional. Millions of Muslims pray in thousands of mosques in the US, and the President goes to the mat again and again to avoid a war of religious rhetoric: nonetheless, the vision of a war against Islam is conjured up out of the depths of a rife imagination and a psychology of humiliation. Real world politics, where compromise takes place, where facts matter, and where individuals live complex lives that cannot be reduced to slogans, is eclipsed by the planetary mass of opaque ideology. All power to the imagination? The erstwhile slogan of emancipation turns into a description of total delusion. Before the terrorist attempts to eradicate the real world, he expels it from his mind. And the American crimes, which self-appointed Reid would avenge? Saving Bosnian Muslims from genocide, defending the independence of the Muslims of Kuwait, or endeavoring to end the chaos in Muslim Somalia: none of these American missions makes a dent in Reid's prejudices. How marvelous is the power of faith to overlook fact! His concern for the fate of Iraqi children should have led him more properly to direct his ire at the United Nations or at Saddam Hussein himself. Yet fanaticism is precisely such imperviousness to reality. Untroubled by complexity, he preserves a rigidly binary worldview, mechanically schizophrenic, in which Westerners, especially Americans as such, hate Muslims, without differentiation.

In contrast, Judge Young's eloquent reply provides precisely the opposite vision: instead of the generalized confrontation of Americans and Muslims, he insists on the dignity of the individual as the bedrock of justice. To be sure, Young simultaneously invokes a national, i.e., supraindividual history, with reverberating echoes of Lincoln and Kennedy. He also points to the flag as a symbol of collective identity; his paen to the dignity of the individual is lodged unmistakably in a specific cultural tradition. Yet the value of the flag, as understood by Young, is precisely not its symbolic collectivism (for all the talk of "one nation") but its semantic

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guarantee of justice for all individuals *as individuals.* In this light, the War on Terror, or at least this one encounter, becomes one more step in the emancipation movement of modernity, the constantly renewed aspiration to escape from the violence of backward dogma and mythical cycles of blind repetition. Nonetheless, the tension between individualist aspirations and shared symbolism, that stands out saliently in Young's discourse, marks the fault line within the War on Terror: when does the pursuit of security, in the face of a real enemy, undermine the same individual dignity that Young identifies as the core of his value system? What happens when an extremism in defense of liberty contributes to the magnification of state power, no matter how good the intentions?

Three essays in this issue specifically explore the genealogy of terror (and several others address this matter indirectly). Public debate keeps drawing close to an account of clashing civilizations, the Judeo-Christian West in conflict with Islam. This version is repeatedly recurring, despite the strenuous efforts by the opinion-making elite, including the President, to resist linking terrorism to Islam *per se*. The stereotypical invocation in public speeches of the "religion of peace" can only reflect an anxiety that significant parts of the public think exactly the opposite, and there is surely much evidence in the daily news to support such a skeptical perception. After all, it was not nineteen Pennsylvania Amish farmers or Philippina nuns on September 11 who hijacked the planes. The result is a latent, and not only latent, debate about a clash of religions or civilizations, even if the thesis is not endorsed by elite opinion; on the contrary, every effort is made to repress such speculation. It is worth reflecting on this specific "high-low" divide. On the one hand, it is tempting to evaluate the stratification of opinion as an indication of a competition between the greater capacity for abstraction, characteristic of social actors with wider horizons and a cruder, more immediate sense-certainty. A hierarchy described in this manner is certainly reminiscent of Lukacsian judgments: the "religion of peace" rhetoric is preferred by what was once called the "progressive bourgeoisie," while "clash of civilizations" belongs to those disparaged as "petty bourgeois." On the other hand, the universalism of the elite is clearly also an expression of a globalizing agenda, in conflict with more local and populist predispositions. In any case, Reid is absolutely wrong to imagine that US policy is driven by an animus toward Islam: there are certainly those who might wish it so, but government policy is far too devoted to a globalization agenda to fence itself into a particularist definition. This is precisely the point at which paleoconservatives

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could object to the neo-conservative neo-Wilsonianism of the administration. (Further proof of the decline of the left is the fact that at this point in time it appears that even anti-imperialism, a classic left position, has more substance among substantive conservatives than among confused progressives.) But while the government — whatever it is pursuing — is not anti-Muslim, the terrorist's own hatred is seen and heard as indisputably, characteristically, and irreversibly anti-Western.

The West versus Islam? There is enough counter-evidence to undermine that excessively dichotomous interpretation, at least on the Western side. Secularism in the US and even more so in Western Europe has become so all-pervasively hegemonic, with an especially deep bias against any Western religion: against Christianity and (on a different scale) against Judaism: the real basis for anti-Semitism today remains a hostile resentment toward this, the Ur-religion of the West. Many Europeans will never accept the clash-of-civilizations thesis because they simply no longer identify with the Christian West: they no longer see themselves as carrying a civilization that might clash with another one. Part of this has to do with the caricatured and hostile representation of medieval Catholicism in contemporary education as a vehicle of intolerance and backwardness. Why do battle with Islam in the name of a Christianity that most Europeans have renounced anyhow? Moreover, parts of the public invoke the grandeur of medieval Islamic culture and its high degree of tolerance: in this account, the clash of civilization is reduced to a conflict between the worldly and benign Islam of medieval Spain and the lugubrious cruelty of the Inquisition.

All this mitigates against the tenability of a religious explanation of terrorism. While terrorists invoke fundamentalist Islam in order to explain their own acts of violence, it hardly follows that one agree with them and therefore accept as authoritative their sectarian derivation of terror from Islam. Perhaps al-Qaeda and its sympathizers have a distorted and tendentious account of Islam (not unlike the distorted account of classical German culture which the Nazis advocated). Can one not limit the ramifications of the terrorist own claims by treating less as authoritative commentary on Muslim sacred texts and more as merely pretexts, manipulative misappropriations of the religious legacy, abducted in order to defend an otherwise indefensible practice? Yet if religion does not work as an explanation, terror remains unexplained. Because the terrorists were never clear and specific in their goals (instead of particular demands, generalized cultural criticism), public opinon in the West was susceptible to a process,

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in which various political agenda within the West were projected onto the blank screen of the terrorist deed, thereby apparently legitimating them.

To offer the cultural-religious difference — the clash of civilizations between the Judeo-Christian West and the Muslim Arab world — as the full account of the origins of Islamic terrorism is probably a too convenient way to keep terror at arm's length. Of course, just because Islam is not an adequate explanation does not mean that the abstract universalism of elite, liberal opinion, which minimizes religion, is correct. The more it avoids the sacred, the more sanctimonious it gets. Its refusal to engage more deeply with terror — not the alleged grievances that the Left likes to trot out in order to justify terror but the desire for terror as such — may well be taken as an indication of a proximity to terror, the opposite of a cultural difference. It is not as if terror is foreign to the West and Western traditions, nor is the compelling point of comparison the violence associated with premodern forms of Christianity. On the contrary, any adequate discussion of terror has to proceed through the history of Western modernity that begins with the foundational Terror of 1793, and this capacity for violence, which has been amplified exponentially in the past century of totalitarian terror.

Contemporary terrorism of the Islamic sort, derives, at least in part from the same West which, on occasion, sees itself as the enlightened "other" to its seemingly exotic and benighted challengers. In other words, fundamentalist terror might be less a dogmatic consequence of Islam, understood as an absolute other to the rationalism of the West, than it is an export of certain features of Western thought and politics — the chiliastic vision of radical change, for instance — looped through the culture of the Arab world and then returning to the West with a vengeance. In this light, Gupta's essay succeeds at placing al-Qaeda right at the heart of European culture, in the philosophical world of Hegel and Nietzsche. Violence devolves, he argues, first from the scene of suffering in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, whereby terror emerges from the pursuit of absolute freedom: al-Qaeda turns out to be heir to the Jacobins who pursued their own nexus of freedom and terror. Al-Qaeda kills randomly, destroying all particular quality, in the same way that the Jacobin guillotine became random and anonymous, lacking in any particular interest: objectivity is the cold disregard for the victim. Yet, al-Qaeda is also susceptible to a Nietzschean analysis. It is framed by a Nietzschean dynamic, in which the ressentiment of the priests, their hatred for vitality, animates their desire to kill or to die. Islamic terror fits the Nietzschean model of religious

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hatred of life: that logic offers an explanation of suicide bombing. If emancipation vindicates the *Lebenswelt* against the cold fingers of bureaucracy, this terror seeks to establish the *Todeswelt*, in which innovation ceases. The goal is not some specific political demand but death itself, since death offers the only ultimate purification from the perpetually threatening degradation of living. This is where the Nietzschean dimension adds psychological depth to Hegel and to any political interpretation. Al-Qaeda is not really about this or that political issue; the suicide bombers are hardly policy wonks. It is about a desire to end sin by bringing life to an end.

All this, however seems to stand at odds with aspects of Pellicani's account. In this excerpt from his forthcoming book on terror, he argues forcefully that the predisposition to terroristic destruction does indeed have specifically Islamic roots. He leads us through reference points within the Islamic discourse that apparently corroborate the terrorist outcome. Hence two competing genealogies of terror: a Westernizing model, al-Qaeda as Jacobins, versus an indigenist one, the Muslim revolt. Pellicani does force a reconsideration of the clash of civilizations: not that Islam, as such, means terror, but that there are definitive and non-marginal justifications of terror within Islamic discourse, which have come to the fore. For reasons of political correctness, this consideration is largely tabooed in official public debate, but it keeps recurring, more in fact in Europe than in the US. Indeed prominent politicians like Berlusconi and journalists, such as Oriana Fallaci, have propounded variants of the culture-clash thesis in public and have done so adamantly. While many Europeans may have preferred to stand on the sidelines in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, they also give expression to a much more intense anxiety about Islam as such than in the case in the US. This heightened sensitivity reflects the irritation across Europe with questions of immigration. Of course, some of the anti-immigration sentiment can be attributed to the poor economic performance typical of the Euro-zone, especially in contrast with current growth rates in the US. Moreover, immigration is certainly also a point of controversy in the US (although not particularly Islamic immigration). Nonetheless there is currently a much greater European predisposition to view immigration, especially from the Muslim world, as a threat to the integrity of European identity than in the US, where the social — rather than cultural — costs are in the foreground and where, in any case, there remains considerable and historically rooted support for immigration, both in the context of liberal allegiances and in

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light of business interests. In that European framework, Pellicani's account of the specifically Islamic sources of terrorism implies a larger set of assumptions regarding the threatened cultural viability of "Europe."

Küntzel provides another Westernizing account, and, like Gupta, he puts radical Arab politics in a German context, but a quite different one. For Gupta, the points of reference are Hegel and Nietzsche; for Küntzel, the connection is the history of German imperial ambitions in the Middle East and, above all, the legacy of the Nazi strategic efforts to outflank the British Empire by pursuing a pro-Arab politics. This agenda obviously allowed for a foreign policy that could accommodate a substantively anti-Jewish position, and was therefore ideologically consonant with the core tenet of National Socialism. Küntzel hearkens back to a repressed historical moment in the early 20th century, when Arab moderates and modernizers welcomed Jewish immigration to Palestine as a progressive influence. Across the region, from Iran through Turkey to Egypt, opportunities for development were emerging. Jewish settlement in Palestine was viewed as an additional factor pushing toward modernization, and opportunities for cooperation with Arab progressives began to emerge. Yet, that potential alliance was disrupted by a radicalized anti-Zionist turn explicitly encouraged by Nazi propagandists. German foreign policy ambitions vis-à-vis the British Empire and strategic concerns throughout the region pushed toward an ideological foreign policy: anti-Jewish, anti-modern, and anti-Western.

The implicit question — as with the general question of Islamic terror — is how to evaluate Arab anti-Semitism: what component derives from Islam and other indigenous belief structures, and how much can be attributed to this sort of intrusion of a Western ideology? To the extent that Küntzel has it right, anti-Jewish sentiment was primarily a European import, especially from Germany. One cannot escape the observation that the beginning of the post-Arafat era may therefore represent the belated end of the Nazi fantasy. That hypothesis is consistent with a parallel historical evaluation of Iraq: Ba'athism, like Arab anti-Semitism, derived significantly from a German anti-British agenda and was explicitly cultivated by German foreign policy. The defeat of Saddam and the transformation of the Iraqi authoritarian state consequently represent the decisive end to the imitative totalitarianism to which the Ba'athist regime aspired: the fall of Baghdad is the fall of Berlin, again. Indeed, as of this writing, a political transformation appears to be underway across the region, a crumbling — or at least a withering away — of the fertile crescent of

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repressive regimes: elections (of sorts) in Saudi Arabia, proposed reforms in Egypt, the pending liberation of Lebanon with likely consequences in Syria. This domino effect across the Arab world can only be compared to the sudden collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989.

This wave of liberalization is of course unthinkable without US foreign policy after 9/11. Yet, it was precisely that policy that ignited the anti-Americanism, especially in Europe, in recent years. When, in the aftermath of the attacks in Washington and New York, the American administration began to signal its intent to attack Afghanistan and topple the Taliban, preemptive opponents of the war predicted that any such intervention would necessarily trigger world-animosity, which in turns was likely to unleash massive demonstrations in the "Arab street." The predicted inescapable result would be the collapse of pro-American, moderate regimes throughout the region. History had it otherwise. In fact, it was not that "Arab street" that was filled with protestors but the streets of the Western European capitals (in most cases of course those demonstrators were courageously siding with their own governments). The "Arab street" was largely quiet until, in the wake of the American interventions and a series of elections, the assassination of the former Prime Minister in Lebanon has truly set off a spontaneous pro-democracy movement. No major solidarity demonstrations with Lebanese democracy have yet been reported from Europe.

It has been strange indeed to find the left and liberal public opinion largely hostile to a foreign policy of democratization and basically prepared to defend authoritarian regimes, such as Saddam's Iraq. (In the anti-war demonstrations in Paris, at least, large, iconic pictures of Saddam were held up to indicate loyalty and admiration. These events were not simply about being against Bush; there was positive affection for Saddam, although few will admit it now.) Gone is the nineteenth-century solidarity of democrats, when publics waxed enthusiastic for freedom fighters against tyranny. It has been replaced with anti-Americanism, and Werz explores some of its specific manifestations. He is no doubt correct that the current suspicion of the America is not a replica of the conservative anti-Americanism of the early 20th century, which typically involved an explicit rejection of modernity as such. Even in old Europe there is little feudal nostalgia anymore. Hence the phenomenon which public opinion poll researchers are beginning to discover, the "ambivalence" of anti-Americanism. Hostility to Americans and American culture (and not only to the current administration or the red states) can exist side by side with

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jeans, jazz, and hamburgers. This evidence however should not be taken as proof that the whole problem is merely a rejection of this or that particular policy. Rather the ambivalence has to do with modernity as such. This is the level at which a discussion of anti-Americanism has to begin. If the older anti-Americanism rejected modernity from the standpoint of a *de facto* conservative traditionalism, fearing that "Americanism" was eroding all hierarchy and qualitative values, contemporary anti-Americanism (at least in western Europe) rejects modernity from the standpoint of a post-modernity comfortable with a consumerist relativism and anxious about values. Case in point: older anti-Americanism feared the secularism and godless materialism of the New World, while today's anti-Americans are worry about the role of religion in American public life.

Jacoby's magisterial survey of anti-utopianism provides an intellectual-historical framework that helps sort some of these matters out. To the extent that Islamic terror is a derivative of Western totalitarianisms (for Gupta, it is in the Jacobin lineage; for Küntzel, the Nazi component is crucial), then the elaborate grappling with totalitarianism, one of the central matters of mid-20th-century Western intellectual life, regains a new pertinence at our current historical juncture. Hence the importance of Jacoby's return to Popper, Talmon, Berlin, and Arendt. Their reflections on Stalin and Hitler deserve review in the face of the violent anti-modernism of Islamic extremism. Not that these matters translate neatly. The specifically non-state character of al-Qaeda cannot be shoehorned into the paradigms of the expansive state apparatus of the totalitarian machines. Yet, one of the most salient themes that pervades that literature is precisely the anti-political, indeed unpolitical character of totalitarianism. To be sure, everything becomes propaganda, but there is no room for politics in the sense of civic debate because radicalized utopianism or ideology takes over. The rebirth of the political today is precisely this effort to maintain politics against a challenger that would suppress it, using acts of violence in the name of apocalyptic finality.

In addition, the 20th century critics of repressive utopianism have consistently held out the value of the individual as an opposite to the ideological comprehensiveness that characterizes the totalitarian vision. Jacoby discovers this repressive character inherent in the utopian instinct at the very origins of modernity. While Thomas More's *Utopia* may have been celebrated as a benign document of the humanist imagination, and while More himself has become an icon of integrity and civic courage, the man who stands on principle even if it costs him his life, Jacoby recovers

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the dialectic in More's own biography, from humanist to fanatic, from learned utopian to the persecutor of heretics. The point is not that all heroes can be debunked, but that even at the origins of modernist optimism, there is an uncomfortable proximity to terror. More's biography displays the dialectic of utopianism and anti-utopianism, enlightenment and repression, enthusiasm and disillusionment which make up the political and intellectual histories of modernity.

That dialectic, with all its *Sturm und Drang*, seems to subside or even mellow in the post-modernity of the metropolis, at least in Bergey's reconstruction of Simmel. The experience of the city and the money economy transform the personality and undermine the stability of inherited forms. The result however is not a drama of oppression and resistance, but an attitude equally blasé and bewildered. This cult of the self is a response to the preponderance of an objective and apparently unchangeable world. Hence, at best, a quietist and aestheticist response to the observed world; hence a predisposition to ignore others, to disengage, to retreat into a subjectivism of passivity. In the context of the articles in this issue, Bergey's Simmel appears to provide a description of a depoliticized world, the world before 9/11 or, arguably, the European utopia of unexamined lives. Passivity has the advantage, after all, of being peaceful. Yet — one of Werz's lessons — neither modernity nor post-modernity has a single geographical home. What Bergey demonstrates is that the metropolitan experience, interpreted by Simmel, and on whatever continent, has more to do with the deflationary affect of post-modernism than with modernism and its exaggerated utopianisms.

The end of the end of history, dating from September 11, also meant the end of multiculturalism and the end of post-modernism, at least the post-modernism of silly indeterminacy. Earlier epistemological models of undecideablity or the refusal to adjudicate among plural meanings lost their credibility precisely with the return of politics: not the politics of motley coalitions, not the managed repression of political correctness, but a politics of values and action. This is what is at stake in the exchange between Boucher and Zizek. The discussion is framed in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis — hardly a topic to which *Telos* has devoted much space — but the core issue is very much one to which this journal has paid attention, the character of the political within the frame of basic tensions that pervade Western, especially German philosophy. Boucher proceeds from an admiration of Zizek to a critique of the latter's alleged predisposition to foreclose political pluralism and thereby to veer toward

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a repressive, prepolitical stance (or so it is judged by Boucher). However, for Zizek, the post-modern polysemousness, which he in turn attributes to Boucher, is nothing other than an avoidance of the political decision on principle. Decisionism versus indecisionism? In fact, Zizek can lodge the question, elegantly, in the core problematic of German idealism, the evaluation of the transition from Kant to Hegel as regression (to a precritical dogmatism) — this is how he interprets Boucher's critique of his own work — or as progress (toward a more consistently progressive and radical epistemology). Neither has much to say about the political material in the articles on terrorism, but the very fact that the Boucher-Zizek exchange recasts a psychoanalytic tradition in an adamantly political-theoretical register is a sign of these embattled times.

Russell A. Berman

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The Sentencing of Richard Reid[1]

On January 30, 2003, Richard Reid was sentenced to life imprisonment after confessing to attempting to destroy a jetliner with explosives he had concealed in his shoe. The trial concluded with this sharp exchange between Reid and Judge William Young.

RICHARD REID: I start by praising Allah because life today is no good. I bear witness to this and he alone is right to be worshiped. And I bear witness that Muhammad Sa'laat Alayhi as-Salaam is his last prophet and messenger who is sent to all of mankind for guidance, with the sound guidance for everyone.

Concerning what the Court said? I admit, I admit my actions and I further, I further state that I done them.

JUDGE WILLIAM YOUNG: I didn't hear the last. I admit my actions and then what did you say?

REID: I further admit my allegiance to Osama bin Laden, to Islam, and to the religion of Allah. With regards to what you said about killing innocent people, I will say one thing. Your government has killed 2 million children in Iraq. If you want to think about something, against 2 million, I don't see no comparison.

Your government has sponsored the rape and torture of Muslims in the prisons of Egypt and Turkey and Syria and Jordan with their money and with their weapons. I don't know, see what I done as being equal to rape and to torture, or to the deaths of the two million children in Iraq.

So, for this reason, I think I ought not apologize for my actions. I am at war with your country. I'm at war with them not for personal reasons but because they have murdered more than, so many children and they have oppressed my religion and they have oppressed people for no reason except that they say we believe in Allah.

This is the only reason that America sponsors Egypt. It's the only reason they sponsor Turkey. It's the only reason they back Israel.

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1. The transcript could be found on http://www.cnn.com/2003/LAW/01/31/reid.transcript/.

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As far as the sentence is concerned, it's in your hand. Only really it is not even in your hand. It's in Allah's hand. I put my trust in Allah totally and I know that he will give victory to his religion. And he will give victory to those who believe and he will destroy those who wish to oppress the people because they believe in Allah.

So you can judge and I leave you to judge. And I don't mind. This is all I have to say. And I bear witness to Muhammad this is Allah's message.

YOUNG: Mr. Richard C. Reid, hearken now to the sentence the Court imposes upon you.

On counts 1, 5 and 6 the Court sentences you to life in prison in the custody of the United States Attorney General. On counts 2, 3, 4 and 7, the Court sentences you to 20 years in prison on each count, the sentence on each count to run consecutive one with the other. That's 80 years.

On Count 8 the Court sentences you to the mandatory 30 years consecutive to the 80 years just imposed. The Court imposes upon you on each of the eight counts a fine of $250,000 for the aggregate fine of $2 million.

The Court accepts the government's recommendation with respect to restitution and orders restitution in the amount of $298.17 to Andre Bousquet and $5.784 to American Airlines. The Court imposes upon you the $800 special assessment.

The Court imposes upon you five years supervised release simply because the law requires it. But the life sentences are real life sentences so I need not go any further.

This is the sentence that is provided for by our statutes. It is a fair and a just sentence. It is a righteous sentence. Let me explain this to you.

We are not afraid of any of your terrorist co-conspirators, Mr. Reid. We are Americans. We have been through the fire before. There is all too much war talk here. And I say that to everyone with the utmost respect.

Here in this court where we deal with individuals as individuals, and care for individuals as individuals, as human beings we reach out for justice.

You are not an enemy combatant. You are a terrorist. You are not a soldier in any war. You are a terrorist. To give you that reference, to call you a soldier gives you far too much stature. Whether it is the officers of government who do it or your attorney who does it, or that happens to be your view, you are a terrorist. And we do not negotiate with terrorists. We do not treat with terrorists. We do not sign documents with terrorists. We hunt them down one by one and bring them to justice.

So war talk is way out of line in this court. You're a big fellow. But you're not that big. You're no warrior. I know warriors. You are a terrorist. A species of criminal guilty of multiple attempted murders. In a very real sense Trooper Santiago had it right when first you were taken off that plane and into custody and you wondered where the press and where the TV crews were and you said you're no big deal. You're no big deal.

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What your counsel, what your able counsel and what the equally able United States attorneys have grappled with and what I have as honestly as I know how tried to grapple with, is why you did something so horrific. What was it that led you here to this courtroom today? I have listened respectfully to what you have to say. And I ask you to search your heart and ask yourself what sort of unfathomable hate led you to do what you are guilty and admit you are guilty of doing.

And I have an answer for you. It may not satisfy you. But as I search this entire record it comes as close to understanding as I know. It seems to me you hate the one thing that to us is most precious. You hate our freedom. Our individual freedom. Our individual freedom to live as we choose, to come and go as we choose, to believe or not believe as we individually choose. Here, in this society, the very winds carry freedom. They carry it everywhere from sea to shining sea. It is because we prize individual freedom so much that you are here in this beautiful courtroom. So that everyone can see, truly see that justice is administered fairly, individually, and discretely.

It is for freedom's seek that your lawyers are striving so vigorously on your behalf and have filed appeals, will go on in their, their representation of you before other judges. We care about it. Because we all know that the way we treat you, Mr. Reid, is the measure of our own liberties. Make no mistake though. It is yet true that we will bear any burden; pay any price, to preserve our freedoms. Look around this courtroom. Mark it well. The world is not going to long remember what you or I say here. Day after tomorrow it will be forgotten. But this, however, will long endure. Here, in this courtroom, and courtrooms all across America, the American people will gather to see that justice, individual justice, justice, not war, individual justice is in fact being done. The very President of the United States through his officers will have to come into courtrooms and lay out evidence on which specific matters can be judged, and juries of citizens will gather to sit and judge that evidence democratically, to mold and shape and refine our sense of justice. See that flag, Mr. Reid? That's the flag of the United States of America. That flag will fly there long after this is all forgotten. That flag still stands for freedom. You know it always will. Custody, Mr. Officer. Stand him down.

REID: That flag will be brought down on the Day of Judgment and you will see in front of your Lord and my Lord and then we will know.

(Whereupon the defendant was removed from the courtroom.)
YOUNG: We'll recess. All rise.

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Freedom of the Void: Hegel and Nietzsche on the Politics of Nihilism: Toward a Critical Understanding of 9/11

Jay A. Gupta

Occasionally you will hear it said that the violence perpetrated by organizations such as Al Qaeda is "nihilistic." The senses of the term as thus employed seem to be largely intuitive, and involve a cluster of notions. The journalist and pundit Christopher Hitchens, for example, offers up such descriptions as "sinister grandiosity," "pointless nastiness," and "the tactic of demanding the impossible and demanding it at gunpoint."[1] The idea is that contrary to the revolutionary, idealist rhetoric of those enacting the violence, there is something hollow, cruel, and irrational at the center of such actions. This intuitive application of the term "nihilistic" to organizations such as Al Qaeda has substantial merit, and it is in fact possible to specify a more detailed philosophical and psychological basis to the concept.[2] A properly elaborated concept of nihilism is of considerable interpretive utility where some of the familiar socio-political concepts like "colonialism," "globalization," and the like have demonstrable shortcomings. Hegel and Nietzsche have, in separate ways, developed the sort of philosophical and psychological basis to the notion of nihilism as discussed here.

It needs to be stated here at the outset that nihilism is not a phenomenon for which there is a univocal criterion to establish its presence or absence. An ideology or revolutionary movement does not test positive or

1. Christopher Hitchens, "Terrorism: Notes Towards a Definition," in A *Long Short War: The Postponed Liberation of Iraq* (New York: Plume/Penguin, 2003).

2. This essay will not be dealing with the late 19th century movement that is closely associated with anarchism.

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negative for "nihilism" like a viral strain. At best, the adjective "nihilistic" can be used with greater or lesser justification in attempting to understand and criticize the character of certain ideologies and the destructive acts that they engender.

Hegel on Negative Freedom

Hegel was shocked by the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution. In both the *Phenomenology of Spirit*[3] and the *Philosophy of Right*,[4] he offers an analysis of it in terms of the relation of attitudes to practice. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the attitude in question is "freedom," and the practice in question is "terror."[5] His discussion follows ominously on the heels of the section entitled "The Truth of Enlightenment." For Hegel, the very concept of revolution in a sense becomes the equivocal axis upon which Enlightenment notions of freedom and rationality readily revolve into uncompromising attitudes of tyranny and terror. In bringing forth the principle of political modernity in Europe — the freedom of "man qua man" and the freedom of subjectivity[6] — the Revolution gets stalled from 1793-4 in what Hegel regards as an "abstract" phase.[7] This phase results in the Reign of Terror. Hegel's question was: how does a certain attitude, one linked to an ideology that is ostensibly expressed in an agenda of emancipation, convert into a practical reality that results in the internment and murder of thousands of citizens, or more simply, what is the relation of freedom to terror? The answer for Hegel lies in the abstract, negative character of the so-called "free" attitude in question. What then does it mean to say that an "abstract" attitude leads to practices that result in terror, death, and destruction?

I will elaborate Hegel's views first by considering specific, albeit often obscure statements about the Revolution made in the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*, and then move on to a consideration of

3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 1987), hereafter cited as *PS* and *PG* respectively.

4. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (London: Oxford U. Press, 1952). Hereafter cited as *PR*. G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse* (1821) (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1970); Hereafter cited are section numbers; R=Remark; A=Addition.

5. Hegel, *PS*, *op.cit.*, pp. 355-65, ; Hegel, *PG*, *op.cit.*, pp. 385-94.

6. See for example Hegel, *PR*, *op.cit.*, pp. 273A.

7. Hegel uses the term "absolute freedom" in the section of the *Phenomenology* under consideration, but this essay is using his terminology ("abstract freedom") from the *Philosophy of Right*, which he uses with reference to the same events.

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more general theoretical statements made in the *Philosophy of Right.* Without careful inspection, it may appear that I am placing too much import on comments Hegel makes in one particular area of this latter work; but more careful consideration will reveal that his comments there pertain to the consequences of a *negation* that is not a *determinate negation.* It can be said without exaggeration that, from the perspective of his system, there is no greater worry.

Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right* says of the French Revolution: "[We have] for the first time in human history the prodigious spectacle of the overthrow of the constitution of a great actual state and its complete reconstruction *ab initio* on the basis of pure thought alone, after the destruction of all existing and given material. The will of its re-founders was to give it what they alleged was a purely rational basis, but it was only abstractions that were being used. . . . ; and the experiment ended in the maximum of frightfulness and terror."[8]

In principle, Hegel was all for the Revolution. He thought that for the first time in human history, both justice understood as political freedom, and the development of the full capacities of human selfhood, were, in J. Ritter's words, "raised to the principle and aim of society and state."[9] The modern idea of the state, which Hegel sees the Revolution as aiming for, is the idea of a fully mature constitution that is embodied in institutions that are able to sustain the maximum development of the freedom of its citizens, while also engendering a public spirit amongst those citizens aimed towards cultivating the common political good.[10] But during the Revolution these ideals go terribly awry, and something that was thought to have, as Hegel says, a purely "rational basis," ends up being "only abstract," and ends in the systematic murder of citizens directed by, in one of the great sinister ironies of history, the Committee on Public Safety.

In addition to the above quoted passage, Hegel serves up some memorable descriptions of these events in the *Phenomenology.* In them it becomes obvious how his key descriptive terms pertaining to the kind of freedom in question, primarily the terms "abstract" and "negative," hang together. It is more important here to be attentive to the semantic force of certain words, rather than the precise meanings of his admittedly obscure

8. Hegel, *PR*, *op.cit.*, p. 258R.
9. See Joachim Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), p. 52.
10. See Hegel, *PR*, *op.cit.*, p. 260ff.

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statements. He says, "Absolute freedom ascends to the throne of the world without any power being able to resist it[11] . . . there is left for it only *negative* action; it is merely the *fury* of destruction."[12] Further: "It has completed the destruction of the actual organization of the world, and is merely this knowledge of itself as an absolutely pure and free individual self. All that remains of the object by which it can be laid hold of is solely its *abstract* existence as such. The relation, then, of these two is one of wholly *unmediated* pure negation, a negation moreover, of the individual as a being *existing* in the universal. The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water."[13] "*In itself*, absolute freedom is just this *abstract self-consciousness*, which effaces all distinction and all continuance of distinction within it. It is as such that it is objective to itself; the *terror* of death is the vision of this negative nature of itself."[14] "Determinations have vanished in the loss suffered by the self in absolute freedom; its negation is the death that is without meaning, the sheer terror of the negative that contains nothing positive, nothing that fills it with a content."[15]

Again, as striking as these sentences are, their meanings are nonetheless obscure. Clearly, cutting off heads of cabbage is a blunt reference to the guillotine and the cold, brutal meaninglessness of the murder enacted in the name of freedom and "Public Safety"; but it is important to pay attention to the manner, in which Hegel associates the terms "abstract," "pure," "universal," and "negative" as they are applied to "existence" and "freedom," with "destruction," "emptiness," "effacing," "loss," "terror," and "death." The former set of terms ("abstract," "pure," "universal," and "negative") describe *attitudes* of consciousness; the latter ("destruction," "emptiness," "effacing," "loss," "terror," and "death") describe the *practical, realized consequences* of these attitudes. Hence, to reiterate the main question: how do "abstract" attitudes of purity and universality lead to practices that result in terror, death, and destruction? To understand the precise nature of Hegel's somewhat poetic complaint here in the *Phenomenology*, one must consult his *Philosophy of Right*, his mature political philosophy.

11. Hegel, *PS*, *op.cit.*, p. 357, Hegel, *PG*, *op. cit.*, p. 387.
12. Hegel, *PS*, *op.cit.*, p. 359, Hegel, *PG*, *op. cit.*, p. 389.
13. Hegel, *PS*, *op.cit.*, p. 360, Hegel, *PG*, *op. cit.*, p. 390.
14. Hegel, *PS*, *op.cit.*, p. 361, Hegel, *PG*, *op. cit.*, p. 391.
15. Hegel, *PS*, *op.cit.*, p. 362, Hegel, *PG*, *op. cit.*, p. 392-3.

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The *Philosophy of Right*, when placed in the context of Hegel's system, is understood as the philosophy of "objective spirit," that is, as an account of how individual human beings relate to one another within larger structures of interaction — cultural, political, and economic. The basic theoretical or "logical" division of that text can be plausibly understood to follow the structure of the Concept in the *Science of Logic*: the tri-partite structure of the subjective, the objective, and their "synthesis."[16] These theoretical divisions are to be grasped together in a real process of development peculiar to the human will and its freedom.

Most generally, as described in Sections 5-7, the human will has two dimensions: a *subjective*, psychological dimension, expressed in such phrases as "freedom of the will," and an *objective* social dimension, that is embodied in legal, moral, economic, and political institutions such as the family, civil society, and the state. The former subjective psychological dimension corresponds to a notion of freedom as mere *attitude*; the latter objective social dimension corresponds to a notion of freedom as *practice*. The latter for Hegel signifies a more developed, concrete sense of freedom, the former a more *abstract* sense. The Hegelian point stressed here is that the social development of the will into objective practical arrangements can get *stalled* or undergo a kind of crippling atrophy, not unlike the way in which an organism, if not subjected to favorable conditions for its growth, will atrophy and eventually die.[17]

What is the precise manner in which the development of the will, and hence of freedom, stalls for Hegel? The point can be put using the basic contrast between attitude and practice. Freedom can be seen to have two basic senses for Hegel. There is freedom as a kind of pure attitude, and there is freedom as it manifests in practice. Perhaps freedom as mere "attitude" has an unfamiliar ring to it. Freedom as a pure, abstract attitude

16. For a good discussion of how the *Philosophy of Right* "maps" onto the *Science of Logic*, see Kenley Dove, "Phenomenology and Systematic Philosophy" in *Method and Speculation in Hegel's* Phenomenology, ed. by Merold Westphal (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1982), pp. 27-39.

17. Habermas quotes Dieter Henrich, apropos of this kind of organic totality of the state, in critically observing that there is an "emphatic institutionalism" in Hegel's conception of distinctively political freedom, and this may be right. However, it is unclear to how an emphatic institutionalism is dangerous to a free and democratic "open society" if those institutions are indeed *democratic institutions*. Hegel's entire argument, viewed without prejudice, must be construed as an attempt to show how the developed *free individuality* of the citizenry is essential to the structural vitality of a modern state. See Jürgen Habermas, "Hegel's Concept of Modernity," in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, tr. by Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

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is epitomized for Hegel in the stoic philosophy, in the image of the slave Epictetus who, although perhaps chained to a wall, enjoys perfect "freedom of mind." Mere "freedom of the mind" turns out to be a rather empty form of freedom if the conditions of reality do not support it. When conditions are such that a free attitude can translate into an actual practice, then one can speak of a free practice. However, the mere realization of the attitude of freedom into a free practice is not sufficient to guarantee that this practice embodies a fully developed sense of freedom. To see why this is the case, it must be considered how Hegel elaborates his notion of "abstract" freedom in terms of *negative* freedom.

The abstract will has what Hegel calls a *negative* significance. It involves the dissipation of any given, conceived either in terms of external constraints in the world or of inner ones, such as desires or impulses. It is what he calls the "unrestricted infinity of absolute abstraction or universality, the pure thought of oneself."[18] This is the sheer indeterminate innerness of the will which, if it remains fixed in that state, is a kind of *form* that establishes a *negative* relationship to every possible *content*, whether it be the inner content of desires and impulses, or the content presented by the outer world. This is a patently and definitively *immature*, undeveloped state. To illustrate, one can think of the literal immaturity of very small infants. As egos go, infant egos are in some sense indeterminate. They can be considered as pure, abstract, undeveloped will, in Hegel's sense. This will manifests in interactions with the environment that proceed through primitive acts of negation, for example, displacing objects that can be grabbed, sucked, or devoured. The *simple* act of displacement has a primarily negative significance.

This *abstract* attitude, with this implicitly sort of *negative* action, manifests in more sophisticated practical scenarios. That is, regardless of what a particular practical situation or context demands, it is possible to assume a negative posture toward it, purely based on the abstract, undifferentiated, or "monological" character of one's will.[19] Hegel condemns the

18. Hegel, *PR*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

19. Hegel also describes how this attitude manifests *epistemically* in the posture of extreme skepticism, which simply negates, regardless of the rich differentiation of the objects in question, the objects that are to be judged. For every "x," it is possible to assert "not-x" in all cases and in precisely the same way; regardless of how rich and multi-faceted in determinacy some "x" may be, the simple act of negation, the absolute power of doubting, itself remains rigid and monological, deaf and blind to particular distinctions. A "negative freedom" is epistemically asserted that throws all beliefs, regardless of difference and relative justification, "into the same empty abyss." The mere fact of difference is in fact the proposed justification for this monological attitude. Hegel, *PS*, *op. cit.*, p. 51, Hegel, *PG*, *op. cit.*, p. 62).

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"unrestricted possibility of abstraction from every determinate state of mind which I may find in myself or which I may have set up in myself, my flight from every content as from a restriction."[20] Practically speaking, "When the will's self-determination consists in this alone, or when representational thinking regards this side by itself as freedom and clings fast to it, then we have [merely] negative freedom."[21] Negative freedom is freedom understood as "freedom from" some x. This is one of the ordinary senses of freedom, "freedom as the Understanding conceives it."[22] Hegel believes that disastrous consequences ensue if "freedom from" assumes the mantle of everything meant by "freedom," specifically freedom in the sphere of political practice. In this case, the act of negation becomes paramount. "This is freedom of the void, which rises to a passion and takes shape in the world; when it turns to actual practice, it takes shape in religion and politics alike as the fanaticism of destruction — the destruction of the whole subsisting social order — as the elimination of individuals who are objects of suspicion to any social order, and the annihilation of any organization which tries to rise anew from the ruins. . . . Only in destroying something does this negative will possess the feeling of itself as existent. Of course it imagines that it is willing some positive state of affairs, such as universal equality or universal religious life, but in fact it does not will that this shall be positively actualized, and for this reason: such actuality leads at once to some sort of order, to a particularization of organizations and individuals alike; while it is precisely out of the *annihilation of particularity* and objective characterization that the self-consciousness of this negative freedom proceeds. Consequently, what negative freedom intends to will can never be anything in itself but an abstract idea, and giving effect to this idea can only be the fury of destruction."[23]

The negative attitude, because it is a negative attitude, one predicated on a kind of empty, indeterminate universality, destroys *particularity.* It does this as an *effect* of its very constitution; it destroys even when it takes itself to be *building*, that is, even when an ostensibly rich vision of the future guides its actions, when it "imagines that it is willing some positive state of affairs." That is because what is required to maintain and impose its abstract, negative freedom, is the *absence* of determinacy, the absence of particularity, the absence of content. So any constructive, positive

20. Hegel, *PR*, *op. cit.*, p. *5R.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, emphases added.

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action must be a ruse, a dissemblance, if it in fact issues from this essentially abstract, negative attitude. To return to the example of an infant, there is a sense in which actions borne from an essentially contentless, blank, yet dynamic will *must* be negative, they must "displace": this is literally the case in the actions of a very small infant. But this sort of action is manifested at a higher, more sophisticated level. Even when a rich, positive imagery guides a set of actions, if it *in fact* issues from an essential abstraction, a negative, revolutionary will to delete what is, if that will *in fact* has no further content to it, then it *must* result in destruction and *continue* to do so, since the *institution* of this sort of freedom into practice just means the institution of a blank, contentless state of affairs. Therefore, any potential practical development of the will in actual interactive structures and institutions of freedom, for example in an inclusive system of representative democracy, becomes *stalled* indefinitely in favor of a continually negative action.

Perhaps now it becomes more clear why Hegel believes these considerations apply to the Reign of Terror, and beyond. The principle of the revolution was indeed freedom, but what kind, and how was it instituted? Again, for Hegel, a *developed* freedom is not merely the abstract, subjective capacity of the will, but the will as it is *embodied* in objective social and political institutions that exist to educate toward and promote both individual liberty and public responsibility; the genuinely free state is one where a kind of dynamic reciprocity is evident, where the free actions of individuals contribute to the life and function of public, distinctively political institutions, and public, political institutions contribute to the cultivation of the free individuality of the citizenry. The immediate, revolutionary *imposition* of "freedom" remained abstract and therefore destructively negative, because 1) the constitution that was approved by a plebiscite was not *instituted*, and 2) the institutional void was filled by committees that existed merely to protect the *abstract idea* of the revolution. This, in the absence of any positive, actual democratic institutions, remained the idea of *freedom from* the perceived bondage of the monarchy and the embedded feudal forms of life associated with it. This abstract idea of "freedom" remains "freedom from" the restrictive impositions of the *ancien régime*; in the absence of the relevant democratic institutions that actually foster the free individuality of the citizenry, and whose free individuality in turn fosters the strength of those democratic institutions, "freedom" manifests itself as a sheer negative, brutal force, an abstract idea defended by a police state. Hegel saw this vacuity mirrored in

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Robespierre's cult of the Supreme Being, hovering "over the corpse of the vanished independence of real being . . . merely as the exhalation of a stale gas, of the vacuous *Etre supreme.*"[24]

Some general conclusions can be made here. First, Hegel sees a kind of political violence that is specifically connected to a certain attitude, one built on a certain conception of freedom. That conception of freedom is abstract, and hence negative in nature. The logically extreme extension of an attitude of "abstract negation" is violence. Hence, when an abstract attitude of freedom, conceived one-sidedly as *freedom from* any "restrictive content," becomes as a result of revolutionary efforts *effective* in political or practical reality without implicit or explicit institutional structures in place for its concrete development, the situation has the very real potential of disintegrating into bloodshed. Hegel's empirical example was the Reign of Terror, but his insight is intended to be generalizable to other political situations that share its form. In this context, the ostensibly revolutionary ideology of Al Qaeda and affiliated organizations manifest the dynamic structure Hegel describes.

Al Qaeda takes itself to be a revolutionary organization[25] that advances a certain concept of freedom. This concept is distinctively a concept of "*freedom from*" what is perceived to be the Mammon-like tyranny of modern secular cultural, political, and economic institutions. An abstract state of purity is endorsed, one that entails the complete rejection of anything that cannot be interpreted as being in accordance with explicitly religious values and doctrines.[26] It is clear that this organization does not accept any sort of *via media* when it comes to religious and hence life practices; basic principles of tolerance are rejected in favor of a kind of religious totalitarianism. This seems to be a perfect instance of a revolutionary organization that governs itself according to an abstract conception of freedom conceived as freedom from, in this case, what is perceived to be the Satanic structures of the status quo; freedom from such structures presumably will allow the institution of the pure practices

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24. Hegel, *PS*, *op. cit.*, p. 358, Hegel, *PG*, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

25. If one has doubts about whether anyone *besides* members of Al Qaeda takes such claims seriously, one should consider the example of those Saudi women university students who sport Osama bin Laden t-shirts under their abayas, similar to how their counterparts in Western universities idolize Che Guevara (see Neil MacFarquhar, "Saudis Support a Jihad in Iraq, Not Back Home," *The New York Times* (April 23, 2004), available online http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/23/international/middleeast/23SAUD.html?hp.

26. There is a difference between "Islam" understood historically, religiously, and textually, and contemporary ideological and political appropriations of it.

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favored by the organization. It also initiates a program of violence in the total absence of any explicit institutional structures that are to be defended.

On a Hegelian analysis, since all the revolutionary energy is directed towards a rejection of anything that interferes with the abstractly imagined state of purity, in this case, *any modern political or cultural institution*, and it does so in the absence of any existing institutional structures of its own, for example, those associated with a state, what is brought forth into reality is simply the proposed or actual destruction of existing institutions. This is an artifact of the uncompromising character of this attitude in relation to reality. Because of the abstract, monological character of the ideology, there can be no commerce with it, no mediation. There is nothing to discuss, nothing to sort out; the organization *promotes violence in principle*. When violence and destruction *become the principle of the organization*, as Hegel says, "it is precisely out of the *annihilation of particularity*. . . . that the self-consciousness of this negative freedom proceeds." That is, freedom is something that is *felt* or perceived in consciousness, and here the claim is that it is only so felt or perceived through acts of destruction. In an effort to "feel" its freedom, so to speak, the organization becomes committed to the abstract lunacy of harming or destroying any and all existing institutional structures, rather than the hard work of concrete institution-building or reformatory praxis (the latter is out of the question since no such institutions of its own exist). Here, it is the very *determinacy* of the modern world as we know it that stands convicted; the only perceived solution is its purification through its total *erasure*. Freedom *as negation* constitutes the terminal character of this ideology, because that is how freedom is experienced as something *real*.

Another way of putting this point is to say that there is a state of affairs where violence can no longer be justifiably construed as an authentic means towards some end, but rather paradoxically becomes the end itself. Obviously, it is an enormously tricky endeavor to discern when precisely this state of affairs has come about, since as Hegel says, any sort of revolutionary ideology is going to come equipped with a vision as to how things *ought* to look, and how they will look after a violent course of action has been successfully undertaken. One answer to this epistemic problem is to assess the relation of means (violence) to the proposed end.[27] If an unreasonable chasm separates them, one may be entitled to suspect that the

27. See Jorge Secada's "September 11th and the Ethics of Violence," in *Strike Terror No More: Theology, Ethics, and the New War*, ed. by Jon L. Berquist (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), pp. 75-85.

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means, violence, really *is the end*. Here is some of what Al Qaeda specifically claims in its founding statement.[28] To begin with, there is a conspicuous sense in which the death of as many Americans as possible simply is for Al Qaeda a desirable end in itself. No special detective work concerning "nihilism" is needed when there is an explicit call for genocide. The stated justification for this is that America has declared war on Islam. This claim is demonstrably false. In the domestic sphere, there are over 1,200 mosques in the United States that serve 2,000,000 mosque-attending Muslims out of a total of 7,000,000, with a growth rate in mosques of 25% between 1994 and 2001.[29] In the foreign sphere, the US fought on the side of Muslim populations in Bosnia and Kosovo. What about the so-called US "occupation" of Mecca? This seems to be at best a highly skewed view of the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia. But the withdrawal of a US military presence from the Arabian Peninsula could be treated as a revolutionary end to be achieved, and further, the best case scenario for Al Qaeda, political power in the Arabian Peninsula, as a revolutionary end. For good measure, another end is the termination of any US presence in Iraq. It is unclear how the means, which apart from the events of 9/11 include the destruction in different countries from Europe to Southeast Asia of banks, nightclubs, apartment buildings, and trains — all civilian targets, Muslims among them — have any relationship to these stated ends. As deplorable and cynical as the violence perpetrated by the Bush administration is, it does not suffer from a totally baffling relation of means to end. As poorly thought out and perhaps doomed as it is, the end of "regime change" in Iraq is closely related to the military means employed to effect that end. Without minimizing the important point that extreme violence in itself is horrifying and is perhaps worth categorically condemning on moral grounds, it is important to insist that not all cases of extreme violence should be interpreted in the same way.

Given the chasm between the violent means and the envisioned ends in Al Qaeda operations, perhaps one has to begin to entertain what many Western pundits regard as beneath consideration because it is so unfathomable, the possibility that destruction simply *is* the end. There is a good deal of head-scratching in the Western media that follows upon each cataclysm,

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28. This can be found in Appendix 1 of Fred Halliday's balanced and informed book on 9/11, *Two Hours that Shook the World* (London: Saqi Books, 2002).

29. See Abdus Sattar Ghazali, "The Number of Mosque Attendants Increasing Rapidly in America," *Amperspective.com Online Magazine* (August 4, 2001), available online http://www.amperspective.com/html/mosques_in_us.html.

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because the governing assumption is that each act of destruction has some purpose beyond the destruction itself. Some of these acts are even generously regarded as "mistaken," as with the Riyadh compound bombing that killed a disproportionate number of Muslims. But perhaps it is time for what Thomas Kuhn calls a paradigm shift; the passages from Hegel discussed here pave the way toward one.

The Hegelian analysis of "nihilism" has a certain logic. Strictly speaking, what Hegel calls the abstract, negative will has an indeterminate character, and it acts in the world in such a way that the monolithic logic of universality literally, in a sense, *obliterates* particularity. Hegel may fail to persuade on this score, because it is difficult to fathom why or how such states of affairs have arisen, and how they can genuinely be discerned, although the means-end analysis does provide a suggestion. Through an analysis of Nietzsche, who deepens psychologically the Hegelian picture, one can garner a better sense of the psychological dimension of nihilistic actions, and perhaps an added sense of how genuinely nihilistic forces can be discerned.

Nietzsche on Nihilism and the Psychology of Meaninglessness

Nietzsche is a philosopher who explicitly uses the term "nihilism" (*Nihilismus*). For anyone with some acquaintance both with what Nietzsche means by nihilism and with what Hegel means by abstract negation, the possibility of a comparison presents itself; yet, no explicit comparison has been performed. This is on the one hand surprising, given the vast literature on 19th century philosophy, yet on the other hand not, given the manner in which Nietzsche's opposition to Hegel is traditionally emphasized;[30] and there are of course good reasons to stress the huge substantive and methodological differences between these two philosophers.

Nietzsche's term "nihilism" has by no means been conclusively interpreted, and Nietzsche seems to mean several things by it that depend on the context in which it is used (clearly, as is evident in the posthumously published notes gathered together under the title *The Will to Power*,[31] Nietzsche had ambitious plans to elaborate it).

It is not my intent to settle hermeneutic controversies as to what

30. Karl Löwith famously conceives them as the two poles of the 19th century. See his classic *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, tr. by D. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. xv.

31. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, vol. 1 in *The Complete Works of Nietzsche* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964). Hereafter cited as *WP* and section number.

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Nietzsche might ultimately mean by the term;[32] rather, I am concerned with the particular meanings it receives in *On the Genealogy of Morals*[33] as it is developed alongside the concepts of resentment ('ressentiment') and the ascetic ideal. In that text, Nietzsche deals with what we may term implicit nihilism, in contrast to explicit nihilism. Explicit nihilism may be thought of as "the absolute repudiation of worth, purpose, desirability."[34] It occurs with the realization that the highest values lack any transcendent ground, and have thus been unmasked as valueless; Nietzsche believes that this is, in a sense, the very teleology of morality.[35] Implicit nihilism by contrast operates under the assumption that one's values are rooted in a transcendent source, and thus provide the conditions for the possibility of negating this mortal existence. The Genealogy, which is an inquiry into the "value of values," most effectively brings this latter Nietzschean concern to the fore. Nietzsche's concept of nihilism psychologically deepens Hegel's essentially political insight into the practical consequences of negative freedom.

There are three main components to Nietzsche's concept of nihilism presented in the *Genealogy*: the source of value or meaning in general as issuing from a transcendent source, the ascetic ideal, and resentment. Nietzsche believes that the existence of nihilism signifies the triumph of an attitude that devalues mortal existence.[36] This attitude evolves from what is referred to as a "metaphysic of value," usually in religious form, that represents the source of value as issuing from a place outside this world, for example, from God's will. This metaphysic of value generates ideals, for example the ideal of making one's actions conform to God's will; this is one aspect of what Nietzsche calls the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche

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32. One can get a sense of the latitude in interpretation by simply comparing O. Schutte's contention that nihilism must be seen primarily in light of the West's loss of belief in God in tandem with the operation of a "patriarchal culture," with Nehamas' contention (admittedly made in passing) that "there are no universal standards," with Heidegger's meditation on the *Will to Power* that stresses nihilism to be the "devaluation of the highest values." See O. Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 3; A. Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1985), p. 70; Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 3 (1961), tr. by J. Stambaugh *et al.* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 201ff.

33. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Werke*, vol. VI/2 (1887) (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1968); cites are by essay and section number.

34. Nietzsche, *WP*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

36. "Nihilism . . . is the *negation* of a real world and of Being. . . [it is] *a divine view of the world.*" *Ibid.*, p. 15.

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believes that often allegiance to the ascetic ideal, specifically in its religious form, is accompanied by a kind of repressed anger and resentment, and those who have this allegiance are therefore the most likely to passionately reject the world *in toto*.

For Nietzsche, the attitude of resentment is a powerful social force that takes many shapes. It is essentially rooted in a kind of suffering that Nietzsche believes describes the condition of the vast majority of humans throughout history.[37] Most humans have lived in unfavorable material and social conditions, and have lived at the mercy of various ruling elites. These elites are able to vent their power on the less fortunate and lead desirable lives without suffering any form of reprisal. This incurs resentment among those who are powerless to respond in kind, and who are unable to live desirable lives.

Resentful judgments are at their core characterized by a powerful attitude of negation. This, Nietzsche says, is the "creative" act of resentment; that is, as embodied in what Nietzsche notoriously calls "slave morality,"[38] resentment paradoxically creates through negation: "While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is "outside," what is "different," what is "not itself"; and this No is its creative deed. This is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; its action is fundamentally reaction."[39] From the

37. In this dicussion, one can set aside Nietzsche's rather complex views concerning how resentment and suffering relate to a certain kind of *biological* weakness of the will, and focus on its distinctively psychological characteristics (Nietzsche himself says, "it is a mistake to point to. . . 'physiological degeneration' or even corruption as a cause of Nihilism" (Nietzsche, *WP*, *op. cit.*, p. 1).) For aspects of Nietzsche's "biologism" and its relation to cultural and moral attitudes, see: Nietzsche, *GM, op. cit.*, II.11-12; *GM* III.13; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. by R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), §259-60 (hereafter *BGE*); and (couched in terms of first vs. second nature) *The Use and Abuse of History*, tr. by A. Collins (New York: Macmillan, 1987). Heidegger is especially dismissive of the "alleged biologism of Nietzsche" (see *Nietzsche*, vol. III, p. 39ff), but this merely follows from interpreting Nietzsche through the prism of the "History of Being."

38. Clearly, Nietzsche is, in the selection of his analytical terms, registering a complaint; that is, he is making an *evaluation* in the very course of his inquiry into the "value of values". If he wished merely to be genealogically descriptive, he would have remained satisfied with the "active-reactive" polarity. Nonetheless, the passage under consideration above is preceded by rather detailed etymological considerations concerning the source of values as originating in the character of the evaluators. "Noble," in contrast to "slave," is a comparatively neutral genus that covers the many terms of "proud" self-evaluation that happened to be employed by ancient *aristocracy* cultures.

39. Nietzsche, *GM*, *op. cit.*, I.10.

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resentful standpoint, the judgment "bad" precedes the judgment "good." First, from this reactive standpoint, what is hostile, harmful, and the source of frustration is identified — which includes both things and ways of life that are desired but cannot be acquired, and it is those entities and actions that are termed "bad." This judgment is born from a powerful resentment towards those who, through the good fortune of birth or some other elevated status, are able to freely vent their power, are able to acquire desirable things, and lead desirable lives. Then, everything else, that is, the gentle or harmless, the poor and unfortunate, are considered to be "good." Nietzsche believes that the powerful, contemptuous judgments of ancient aristocracy cultures proceed in the exact reverse: first, it is averred in some way from an attitude of proud self-absorption that "we are the good"; then, as an afterthought comes the judgment "that is bad," in the sense of unfortunate, or "base." Whether or not Nietzsche's specific genealogy of the judgment "good" is accepted, his notion of resentment itself is clear enough, and has a certain psychological plausibility.

To summarize, for Nietzsche, resentment is a reactive, self-replicating, and even a constitutive social force; it pervades the attitudes and even the very language of those who have it; it gets passed on from generation to generation and becomes embedded in cultural norms.

Religion offers a metaphysic of value that gives a favorable interpretation to conditions of suffering, and therefore offers a means through which the brewing energies of resentment may be controlled. This metaphysic of value posits an ideal, what Nietzsche calls the ascetic ideal, which amounts to the spiritual program of transcending the gross matter of earthly, animal existence. One of the motivating factors behind this program of transcendence is that earthly, material existence in the main signifies suffering. For Nietzsche, Judeo-Christian religions are the keenest embodiment of the ascetic ideal,[40] insofar as they make freedom from suffering the highest good, in contrast to, for example, the Aristotelian ideal of happiness, which can only be attained through a powerful, active immersion in life.[41]

Nietzsche says that there are certain judgments and valuations that are

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40. Nietzsche describes several forms of the ascetic ideal, all of which are benign in comparison to the religious form. The forms the ideal takes depends on the sort of people in question and whatever it is that causes them to suffer. In philosophers, for example, it shows up as opposition to the sensual, also a wish for "freedom from compulsion, disturbance, noise, from tasks, duties, worries" (*GM* III.8), and anything that distracts from the realization of a deep instinct to realize the "highest and boldest spirituality" (*GM* III.7).

41. Hegel in a sense makes the same contrast, but substitutes Stoicism for Judeo-Christian religions (see p.6).

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characteristic of the ascetic priest. The chief valuation in question is the value placed on life and existence itself. "The ascetic [priest] treats life as a wrong road on which one must finally walk back to the point where it begins, or as a mistake that is put right by deeds — that we ought to put right: for he demands that one go along with him; where he can he compels acceptance of his valuation of existence."[42] For Nietzsche, this is the fundamental attitude that sits behind otherworldly religious doctrines, a fundamental dissatisfaction with this world.[43] It is in the next world that we will find happiness; this world, this existence, must be endured, ascetically negated. Actual happiness during one's lifetime is not a legitimate, attainable ideal for most; at best, what is achievable is a modicum of freedom from suffering. Instead of Aristotle's *summum bonum*, happiness, the *summum bonum* becomes the absence of suffering, the supreme "value of values."[44] If to live is to suffer, the priest's function is to, in accordance with the general character of the *ascetic ideal* (in contrast to a genuine "happiness ideal"), devise ways of engendering a *freedom from* suffering among his "flock." He "persuades to existence the whole herd of the ill-constituted, disgruntled, underprivileged, unfortunate . . . by instinctively going before them as their shepherd,"[45] and administers antidotes to the necessary suffering that existence entails.

It is here that Nietzsche explicitly weaves his insights about resentment into the discussion. He warns against the "conspiracy of the suffering against the well-constituted and victorious, here the aspect of the victorious is hated. . . . They walk among us as embodied reproaches, as warnings to us — as if health, well-constitutedness, strength, pride, and the sense of power were in themselves necessarily vicious things for which one must pay some day, and pay bitterly: how ready they themselves are at bottom to *make* one pay; how they crave to be *hangmen*."[46] The suffering masses are not passive sufferers; in accordance with the nature of resentment, reaction is their *action*, and hence they can be *actively*, even creatively, spiteful and vindictive, ready to visit "justice" on whomever they can. One of the essential arts of the priest is therefore to alter the direction of resentment, so that it "does not blow up herd and herdsman" alike.[47]

42. Nietzsche, *GM*, *op. cit.*, III.11.
43. While we may wish to reject the global character of this claim, it is worth considering as applicable to some particular cases.
44. Nietzsche, *GM*, *op. cit.*, III.17.
45. *Ibid.*, III.13.
46. *Ibid.*, III.14.
47. *Ibid.*, III.15

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Nietzsche believes that altering the direction of resentment can only be done effectively through the interpretation of suffering as somehow meaningful. *Life itself* can become interpreted as a sort of punishment or test created by God that if properly endured will result in an individual's passage to paradise. This is the primary significance of, for example, original sin. It is an inherited guilt that forces humans to acknowledge their essentially debased condition, and allows them to see that their suffering is a kind of punishment. This invests suffering with a meaning or value it previously lacked. For Nietzsche, this is how something pathetic is transformed into something sublime; one goes from being an invalid to being a "sinner."[48] More generally, life is understood as a "wrong road put right by deeds," that is, as the scene of tests and trials that once successfully negotiated allows the individual to attain salvation, redemption, or some other reward. A way of putting these considerations together that brings the prior considerations with Hegel into focus is to say that life itself is conceived of as merely a *means* to some *other* end.

Prior to the idea of life conceived as a trial or test, when cruel chance selected you to suffer, you were merely at the whim of more powerful forces that with scarcely a dim moment of acknowledgement proceeded to command, enslave, and humiliate you; one's resentment would be exhausted on the intrinsic meaninglessness of these injustices. Suffering now becomes invested with meaning, and the one thing that Nietzsche believes human beings cannot live without is value or meaning. Wherever there is man there is mythology — belief systems that are constituted by value and meaning. For Nietzsche, it is the sign of a healthy mythos if the source of value is conceived to be life and existence *itself*; it is the sign of a weak and therefore life-inimical mythos if the source of value and meaning hails from a transcendent beyond. This latter in some sense is a center of gravity that saps the intrinsic energies of life dry, or that treats life merely as a *means*.

What then is the meaning of ascetic ideals (the central question of Essay III)? Nietzsche observes that "*This* is precisely what the ascetic ideal means: that something was *lacking*, that man was surrounded by a fearful *void* — he did not know how to justify. . . he *suffered* from the problem of his own meaning."[49] This is what the ascetic ideal provides, but in the most attenuated form: Nietzsche calls it the "*faute de mieux*," the "lack of something better" *par excellence*. Human beings are creatures

48. *Ibid.*, III.20.
49. *Ibid.*, III.28.

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that abhor absurdity to such an extent that they are able to uncover meaning anywhere, even in apparently senseless suffering. "The meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself was the curse that lay over mankind so far — *and the ascetic ideal offered man meaning!* It was the only meaning offered so far; any meaning is better than none at all . . . suffering was *interpreted*; the tremendous void seemed to have been filled."[50] That the void "*seemed*" to have been filled is crucial; the ascetic ideal is ultimately a failure. Nietzsche believes that the ascetic ideal disguises an essential nihilism — a "will to nothingness."[51] "This hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself — all this means — let us dare to grasp it — *a will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is and remains a *will!*. . . And to repeat in conclusion what I said at the beginning: man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will."[52]

This clarifies what Nietzsche means when he says that the ascetic ideal is a *faute de mieux*. Human beings, insofar as they are alive, are for Nietzsche "willers": "will to power. . . is after all the will of life."[53] To not will is to not be alive. But being alive is "said in many ways," as it were; life is a continuum that includes barely having a pulse to being the paragon of health. Nietzsche's admittedly radical suggestion is that those who live according to the ascetic ideal in its religious form embody a kind of enfeeblement of the will that in some sense wearily "wills nothing." But from a brute biological perspective this is infinitely better than "not willing," which means "not living." Second nature here is seen in a sense to be at war with first. A second nature that has succumbed to the sedative temptations of the ascetic ideal unwittingly gravitates towards a living death; *being alive* is merely the brute biological condition that allows the human organism to continue enjoying its ideological slumber. But how does such a bizarre state of affairs arise? Through the history of *poorly interpreted suffering*, an astonishing human enterprise that involves the life of religions, cultures, and states.

It seems that Nietzsche is describing an aversion to life that is

50. *Ibid.*
51. They are equated in *GM* III.14 and *GM* II.24.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Nietzsche, *BGE*, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

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grounded in the existential conditions of suffering transformed into resentment, and interpreted favorably according to a metaphysic of value that places the source of value in, for example, God's will or God's plan. That a beneficent, divine being has *planned* out and is witness to your suffering, a being who also has complementary plans for your eventual redemption, makes suffering tolerable. But the essential existential condition of suffering itself is, at the pre-interpreted level, *undesirable*, and thus provides the conditions for the possibility of an elaborate ideological rejection of life. This strikes as being at the root of both "implicit nihilism" and "explicit nihilism."

Explicit nihilism for Nietzsche represents both the encroaching and the realized sense that the interpretation of suffering according to the ascetic ideal is false, that suffering is in fact senseless, and that one's existence stretches over an indifferent, yawning void. Implicit nihilism shows up simply *as* allegiance to the ascetic ideal itself. For Nietzsche, allegiance to the ascetic ideal is implicitly a will to nothingness, a rejection of life and existence. At its most extreme form, it is an attitude of pan-loathing, of self and world; it is the attitude Nietzsche warns against as having a uniquely destructive potential: "Nihilism is not only a meditating over the 'in vain!' — not only the belief that everything deserves to perish; but one actually puts one's shoulder to the plough; *one destroys*."[54]

III. Nihilism in Ideology and Politics

Nietzsche's discussion in some respects psychologically deepens Hegel's discussion. There are probably other ways of envisioning how Hegel's analysis could have a psychologically richer dimension, but Nietzsche offers an immediate suggestion, due to the formal similarities between their discussions concerning a negative, nihilistic attitude observable in the social landscape. They both, in different vocabularies and as aspects of very different philosophical agendas, are concerned to offer criticisms of a certain kind of deformed attitude that can be taken towards existence, one that Hegel characterizes as abstract and negative, Nietzsche characterizes as resentful and ascetic, and that both characterize as potentially realizable in practices where the *purpose* of those practices is simply to destroy; *what* is destroyed is in some sense a secondary consideration.

When Nietzsche, in contrast to Hegel, speaks of the nihilistic devaluation of existence and the possibility of its being realized in destructive

54. Nietzsche, *WP*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

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actions, as "the volcano of resentment," he is speaking of an attitude that it seems to me is *affective* at its core, and therefore provides some insights into the psychological dimension of distinctively nihilistic acts. Hence, this is another at least partial solution to what in the first section was presented as the epistemic problem of discerning truly nihilistic forces in the social-political world. There has to be a demonstrable ideological *devaluation of life*, not just in the biological sense, but in the more robust existential sense of the *liberal* possibilities *this world* in contrast to, for example, the next, coupled with a powerful resentment, such that murder becomes as meaningful as "cutting off a head of cabbage, or swallowing a mouthful of water." There would be a grisly humor and absurdity to the typical Al Qaeda pronouncement that "You love life as we love death,"[55] or to Sheik Omar Bakri Mohammad's recent words, "It is foolish to fight people who want death — that is what they are looking for," if it were not the case that the truth of such statements is becoming more and more practically evident.

It will be useful at this point to address the specifically suicidal character of Al Qaeda operations, to bring out some of the more general features of the attitude and ideology in question. There are no conditions necessary or sufficient to *cause* a suicide mission other than ideological ones. An ideology provides a *rational space* that allows an individual to decide what counts as good or bad reasons for acting. Neither conditions of indigence nor oppression, nor even less plausibly colonialism or globalization, are necessary or sufficient to engender a systematic program of the use of one's own and others' bodies as a weapon (although this is perhaps conceivable as an isolated occurrence). Such a program can only be made intelligible in terms of an ideology that *gives meaning* to these sorts of actions. Hence, this ideology could be understood as providing at least the *necessary* condition for these actions to occur (the sufficient condition would be the actual *decision* of the agent). What is then the character of this ideology?

From Nietzsche, it can be seen that for an ideology to be effective it must be *meaning-conferring*, for there is much in the world that threatens to be, in the absence of such ideology, interpreted as radically meaningless, for example, one's own suffering, or the suffering of those one cares about. It perhaps goes without saying that there is a lot of anger and resentment in Middle Eastern societies related to both actual and perceived suffering. The causes are various, but clearly it is a social situation

55. Issued after the train bombing in Spain.

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upon which an organization like Al Qaeda capitalizes. There can be no doubt that Al Qaeda and its various "executive branches" are partly able to persuade its members that both suicide and the indiscriminate destruction of whomever happens to be around during the execution of an attack, is a reasonable form of "resistance" because of the theological character of its ideology, which seeks to persuade members to self-sacrifice by systematically devaluing living existence in the here and now, and placing value on an abstract hereafter, or to put it more bluntly, on death. The charter of Al Qaeda asks, "what is the matter with you, when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of God, ye cling so heavily to the earth! Do ye prefer the life of this world to the hereafter?" A reasonable response to this is, "well, yes, I do," and this is the response one would expect of someone who is not burdened by the demands of an ideology that regards earthly existence as somehow contemptible. Any measured definition of effective altruism would reject the agenda immediately, partly based the gaping chasm between means and end. So it is no accident that young and angry people are recruited for these missions, that is, people ideologically incapable of thinking in a more comprehensive and deliberate manner about the meaning and effectiveness of their actions. Further, "Little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the hereafter. Unless ye go forth, He will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place." On this description the value of life has a derivative value; what is done here on earth is *for the sake* of the status in the beyond, to avoid penalties or reap rewards, for example, Sheik Omar's promise of bathing with multitudes of women.

It is worth re-quoting Nietzsche: "The ascetic [priest] treats life as a wrong road on which one must finally walk back to the point where it begins, or as a mistake that is put right by deeds — that we *ought* to put right: for he *demands* that one go along with him." Life understood as a "wrong road" has enormous interpretive utility. It allows life itself to be regarded as fundamentally an error, that is, as something fundamentally in need of correction, and it allows for a conception of what deeds can act as a corrective. In the case of Al Qaeda, in terms of what it both recommends and enacts, suicide imposes itself as logically the most satisfactory of acts. There is a certain death-oriented logic in place, and further, one which uses resentment like fuel. An overall ideological devaluation of existence becomes exploited and expressed in a rage where *it does not matter who dies*, self or other. There seems to be a *terminal* will to negate; *causing death* appears to become *both* the means *and* the political end, based it seems, on the perversely high esteem for death.

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The baffling relation of means to end in Al Qaeda operations has already been discussed. Now,what lies at the center of this mystification can be identified: when *life itself* comes to be regarded as a mere means to some other form of existence, one can expect a lethal disarray in the particular revolutionary strategies geared to achieve this end. There is a stunning equivocation at the heart of this end: on the one hand, what is taken to be of ultimate value is the divine, yet on the other, actions done on behalf of it are centered around the value of revolutionary progress, a resolutely earthly affair. Once the scales tip in favor of a fanatical value placed on the divine, this has lethally self-contradictory results for revolutionary praxis. Earthly ends become in principle devalued, even as they are pursued. Indeed, in the mind of one who takes herself to be entering paradise, one can perhaps expect a grateful amnesia, however short-lived, concerning the importance of the revolutionary agenda that granted her ticket.

These considerations reflect on the mode of *reasoning* employed by the suicidal ideologue. Unfortunately, such considerations are often bypassed in favor of causal explanations that deflect attention away from the character of the reasoning employed by such ideologues. What is to be made of something as unfathomable as passenger planes being intentionally piloted into huge structures inhabited by individuals representing all races and creeds? Ought one to make appeal to what philosophers of science like to call "inference to the best explanation"? If so, that explanation will not appeal primarily to the effects of globalization, the effects of colonialism, or refer to "blowback." These are forms of causal analysis that inadvertently serve as rationalizations; they make it seem as if the acts of destruction had little to do with the bizarre reasoning of those who actually perpetrated them. This is a danger generally with causally analyzing human action. *If* a causal analysis is to be performed, it must regard ideology as paramount; ideology at least provides a space of *reasons* that renders the actions of an actor intelligible *to* the actor. It is worth noting that if one were in the presence of someone who was attempting to take your life and who was expressing intense anger buttressed by a religious fanaticism, it is doubtful that you would credit them with a kind of exculpatory rationale. One would not think, "Well, this is reasonable, this person is the product of colonial aggression by Western states." Yet this is the sort of rationalizing (and perhaps also infantilizing) effect that conventional causal explanations have. The considerations offered here at least have the virtue of acknowledging a deep and abysmal irrationality at the heart of certain violent actions, and do not stray far beyond an examination

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of the immediate attitudes and reasoning of the practitioners of those actions. Perhaps most importantly, a legitimate space emerges for *criticizing* such actions based on the kind of *deliberation* the practitioners engage in. This may seem like an obvious point, yet it is rare to see political theorists critically focus on the reasoning of the perpetrators of the sorts of catastrophes in question.[56] It is far more common to jump immediately to a criticism of the policies of, for example, Israel or America that have somehow inexorably led through a chain of causes to catastrophic results.

Since it appears that organizations and movements can have nihilistic tendencies in the absence of explicit religious doctrine, one may have to settle for the somewhat mysterious generalization that the devaluation of existence observable in some ideologies will admit of various psychological influences. However, *if* an ideology devalues existence, then value is conceived to have some primary source other than existence. It is easy to see this in a theopolitical ideology that emphatically places value in a transcendent beyond, but perhaps less clear in other cases. A concluding suggestion, then: nihilism is explicable in some cases as a social phenomenon (with particular emphasis on material conditions) with reference to 1) ideologies that truck in terminally abstract conceptions of freedom, and 2) a metaphysic of value, broadly construed, that de-emphasizes the value of individual mortal existence. The epistemic question as to how nihilistic forces can be genuinely discerned is partially answered with reference to whether or not there is a gaping lacuna between violent means and proposed revolutionary ends. These two divisions respectively represent important aspects of the Hegelian and Nietzschean contributions to a critical understanding of the philosophical, psychological, and political dimensions of what it seems appropriate to term "nihilism."

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56. Russell Berman provides a rare exception to this tendency. See "European Responses to September 11," in *Telos* 121 (Fall 2001), pp. 73-85.

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Islamic Terrorism

Luciano Pellicani

I

With the spectacular attack on the World Trade Center in New York, a new political player, global terrorism, appeared on the scene and with it a new type of war, asymmetrical war. Until September 11, 2001, war had usually been an existential duel between states, each of which trying to impose its will on the enemy with the systematic use of military force. But in the war which began with the destruction of the Twin Towers, the enemy is not a state. It is an actor *sui generis*: invisible, widespread and elusive, who does not use military force, as it does not have any, but terroristic violence. And this is a violence that does not recognize frontiers or respect any judicial or moral laws. Dissolute by definition, global terrorism has the specific psychological objective of creating a general climate of fear. It is inserted in the context of modern industrial civilisation, in which people live in fear precisely because of their security systems. As General Fabio Mini wrote, "the enjoyment of wealth has brought fear of poverty, the enjoyment of integrity has led to the fear of promiscuity, the enjoyment of nature as a consumer good has led to the fear of pollution, the enjoyment of privacy has aroused the fear of intrusion, the enjoyment of logic and rationality has led to the fear of religion and faith, the enjoyment of ethnic and national unity has led to the fear of immigration, diversity and integration, and the enjoyment of peace has led to the fear of war."[1] Another fear, that of terroristic violence, has been added to the list since 9/11. It does not only threaten Americans. It threatens all Westerners and even those of the *Dar al-Islam*, who have left the "way of Allah" and are thus even more blameworthy than the "infidels" themselves. In

1. Umberto Rapetto and Roberto Di Nunzio, *Le nuove guerre* (Rizzoli: Milano, 2001), p. 317.

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Islam's ethical-religious universe, apostasy is an unforgivable sin to be punished with death.

The war launched by al-Qaeda is particularly frightening for two reasons. The first is that its activists are "true believers" who aspire to martyrdom, and are thus ready to die for a cause, in which they identify body and soul. This eliminates the traditional opposition of forces that guarantees civil security, based on deterrence and on the rational calculation of costs and benefits. The second is that suicide terrorists could use the weapons of mass destruction that our technological civilization offers: atomic weapons, chemical weapons (mustard gas, VX, sarin, chlorine, hydrogen cyanide) and biological weapons (botulin, plague, smallpox), not to mention the so-called "new weapons," such as the recently-discovered viruses, including the "mad-cow disease." This is a very disturbing array of possible threats. For instance, it has been calculated that half a kilo of botulinic toxin is capable of exterminating a billion people, a scenario, next to which the 9/11 massacre can only seem as insignificant, which it was not. It is undeniable that the shock caused by the attack on the World Trade Center launched the era of global terrorism, a terrorism without frontiers and without rules. It also triggered the American policy of preemptive wars to eliminate political regimes suspected of giving financial and logistical support to extremist Islamic sects with the declared aim of conducting the holy war against the West.

It is true that there is nothing new about terrorism. In the 20th century, numerous radical nationalistic groups used terroristic violence to achieve their ends. The figure of the suicide bomber is not new, either. The Tamil Tigers have been active for three decades in Sri Lanka, boasting the world's highest rate of suicide missions and turning the "suicide cult" into a kind of national religion. In Palestine, suicide attacks organized by terrorist groups – Hamas, Jihad, Al Aqsa – have been occurring with remarkable regularity since the 1980s. These groups are extremist in both the methods they use and their final objective. That is, to wipe out the State of Israel, "enemy of God" and guilty of having usurped the territory on which they unlawfully settled, allegedly forcing the Arabs to live in permanent humiliation.

Nonetheless, the spectacular attack on 9/11 ushered in something entirely new. It ushered in international terrorism — because this is what al-Qaeda is, in its goals, its structure and in the weapons it threatens to use. The aim of the traditional terrorist groups has always been, and continues to be, very specific. It is the achievement of national independence,

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forcing the enemy to leave the contested land. The militants of al-Qaeda, however, have much broader aims. They do not only want to liberate the Holy Places of Islam (Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem) from the impure presence of the infidels, but also – in fact, above all – to wage a holy war on a planetary scale against the Great Satan, identified as America, the greatest power of the impious Western civilization, materialistic and godless.

The internationalization of Islamic terrorism began in the 1980s. Groups of *ghazi* (warriors of the faith) rose up in Egypt, Algeria, Palestine and Saudi Arabia with a two-fold purpose: to purify the *Dar al-Islam*, expelling the infidels and punishing the apostates, and to islamize the entire world by sword. Among these groups, determined to transform the world into an enormous battlefield, is Osama bin Laden's organization, blamed for waging the global war against the US, starting with the *fatwa* issued on February 23, 1998. In the *fatwa*, bin Laden, dubbed by Western media as the "sheik of terror," denounced Washington's imperialistic policy as a "clear declaration of war against God, his Messenger and Muslims." He also launched an authentic call to arms: "We, with God's help, call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim *ulema*, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's American troops and the devil's supporters allied with them."[2]

Conceived as the armed branch of the *World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders*, al-Qaeda recruited its activists mainly from the *mujahideen* who fought the Red Army, forcing it to leave Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden heads its rigidly hierarchical structure, assisted by a council (*majilis al shura*) and by four committees coordinating the operational units, consisting of cells set up in four continents. Composed of five or six carefully chosen members, intensely indoctrinated and "professionalized" in a severe training process, the cells are decentralized, so that the discovery of one does not reveal the others. Moreover, the cells can also call on "sleepers": militants who, conducting a "normal" and blameless life for years, are ready to come out as soon as the *majilis* order it. In the cells, which are cleverly camouflaged moral microcosms, each member has a specific task. There is the recruiter who selects the new militants; the propagandist who distributes messages, ideological documents and working manuals over the internet; the financier, who guarantees a

2. Massimo Introvigne, *Osama bin Laden* (Milan: Elledici, 2001), p. 109.

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constant flow of material resources; the inspector, who monitors the conduct of the militants; and finally the emir who exercises absolute power on behalf of the *majilis*. The operational cells, led by a management unit, constitute the first circle of Al Qaeda's organizational structure. There is also a second circle, made up of other Islamic organizations with whom Osama bin Laden has relations of cooperation and mutual assistance. After this comes a third circle, a kind of tactical reserve, consisting of "holy war" veterans, not currently active but ready to mobilize. Finally, there are significant indications that a fourth circle exists, consisting of those Islamic states, which give financial and logistical aid to the "sheik of terror" and his henchmen through their secret services.[3]

Given the nature of the goals Al Qaeda is pursuing in the name of Allah, it is to be expected that the militants will be strictly regulated by religious principles and that the space reserved for private life will be reduced to the minimum. The militant is a man who has broken every link with the world around him – godless and corrupt – and who has become a terrorist-monk, totally dedicated to his sacred mission to fight the infidels and apostates wherever they might be. Not only is he afraid of death, but he considers the sacrifice of his life to be religious duty or, even, a privilege. By immolating himself he becomes a *shahid*, a "martyr of the faith," a witness to the divine Truth revealed by the Prophet. This constitutes a powerful psychological gratification; it nourishes the ascetic pride typical of sectarian groups who, encouraged by the ideal of purity, consider themselves as bearers of a message of salvation.

II

The explosion of global terrorism was the extreme manifestation of fundamentalism,[4] developing over the last decades in almost all Islamic countries. This is a very complex phenomenon, in whose name numerous sects operate, sometimes in competition with each other, with a specific ideology and organization. However, they all have the common aim of restoring the full enforcement of the *Sharia* – the Holy Law, eternal and immutable – and the purification of the world, contaminated by the ideas and (non)values of the West. The main concept of fundamentalist sects is that there are two parties – and only two – involved in a permanent war:

3. See Guido Olimpio, *Le rete del terrore* (Milan: Sperling e Kupfer, 2002) and Enrico Bartok, *La multinazionale del terrore* (Padova: Swan, 2001).

4. See Luciano Pellicani, *La Jihad presa alle radici* (Luiss University Press, Roma 2004).

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the party of God (*Hezb-Allah*) and the party of Satan (*Hezb-Shaytan*). It is a mortal war, which has to end with the total and definitive victory of the former over the latter; therefore, with the planetary triumph of the True Religion, destined to reign over all humanity.

To understand the nature of the challenge the West is facing today, it is essential to be clear about the *Weltanschauung* contained in the sacred book on which the holy-war militants base their actions.

Mohammed's prophetic message – the last and final Revelation — gives a clearly dichotomous and war-mongering vision of the world. The *Rasul Allah* — the messenger of God – not only divides the world into two parts — the *Dar al-Islam* (the Abode of the True Religion) and the *Dar al-kufr* (the Abode of Unbelief). It also constantly asserts that there can be no peace between these two domains until Islam has triumphed; that is, until the land of unbelief has been taken over by the "true believers." Sometimes the *Dar al-kufr* is also the *Dar al-harb*, the Abode of War. Moreover this is a holy war, desired by God. Therefore it is a "mission of Truth" aimed at "destroying falsity" in the entire world until "God has given the world back to the Muslims," as a famous *Hadith* recites.[5]

Mohammed conceived the holy war as a religious duty and not what certain scholars – worried about accusations of ethnocentrism – have attempted to demonstrate against the evidence of the letter and spirit of the *Koran*. There is a *Hadith* that says that "the *jihad* is the monasticism of Islam" and that those who fight in the "way of God" – the *ghazi* – will immediately enter Paradise. It is not only a defensive, but also an offensive war, an imperialistic war, which will only cease when the "religion of the Truth" triumphs over all the planet Earth, because its final aim is to establish a single community organized under a charismatic authority, the only interpreter and exclusive guardian of the *Sharia*: the *Umma islamiyya*. On this point, the words of the Koran are unequivocal: "When your Lord revealed to the angels: I am with you, therefore make firm those who believe. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them. This is because they acted adversely to Allah and His Apostle; and whoever acts adversely to Allah and His Apostle — then surely Allah is severe in requiting (evil). This — taste it, and (know) that for the unbelievers is the chastisement of fire."[6] "Slay the idolaters wherever you find

5. Cf. Louis Gardet, *Les hommes de l'Islam* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1984), p. 123.
6. *The Koran*, VIII, 12, 13, 14.

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them, and take them captive and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush. . . . Fight them, Allah will punish them by your hands."[7]

Hence the call to arms against the unbelieving and godless Western world launched by Terrorism International cannot be seen only as a distortion of Mohammed's message. It is true that the fundamentalist reading of the *Koran* is openly and strongly contested within the Islamic community. It is also true that the fundamentalist movements do not hesitate to use terrorism against the *Dar al-Islam* governments, guilty of having supported the imperialist designs of the Great Satan. There is no doubt that, in the *Koran*, the holy war, the *jihad* against unbelievers, is clearly spelled out, up to the planetary triumph of the True Religion (*Din Hanif*). Despite the fact that Islam openly condemns suicide, there is an extremely significant historical precedent: the band of suicide assassins founded by the Old Man of the Mountain, which terrorized the Middle East between the 12th and 13th centuries.[8] This is a precedent to which Sheik Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi referred to, albeit indirectly, in April 2002 from the pulpit of the prestigious al-Azhar University of Cairo, when he declared that the "martyrdom operations" were the "highest form of *jihad* operations" and that they should be considered an "Islamic commandment."[9]

Whatever the degree of orthodoxy of Islamic fundamentalism, it has created a breeding ground for global terrorism because it has reactivated those eschatological and millennarian elements of the Koranic message that the *ulama* (interpreter and guardian of the *Sunna*) had kept in a state of hibernation. By insisting on the division of the world into two parties, the party of God and the party of Satan, implacable mutual enemies and destined to fight each other in a battle of cosmic-historic significance, it has not only justified terroristic violence but has also raised it to the rank of categorical imperative and religious mission. In what is considered the main inspiration of Islamist fundamentalism – *In the Shadow of the Koran* by Sayyid Qutb, greatest theoretician of the *Al Ikhhwan al Muslimum* society (the Muslim Brotherhood) founded in 1928 by the Egyptian Hassan al Banna , one reads that: "Islam is called to fight out of necessity, if it wants to lead and guide humanity. . . . Being Muslim means being a warrior (*mujahid*), a community of permanently armed warriors, ready to place themselves at God's disposal, whenever God requests it, because

7. *The Koran*, IX, 5 and 14.
8. Cf. Luciano Pellicani, "Islam and the West," in *Telos* 121 (Fall 2001), p. 86, n.1.
9. Cf. Alan M. Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 80.

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only He is the true leader in battle. Needless to say, Islam aspires to peace, but because of the aggression it suffers it finds it is forced to go to war and to use military force. . . . The recourse to war is first of all a moral and spiritual exercise for the believers engaged in it: we test ourselves to prove solid moral virtues; war frees us from the vain desires of this world and helps us to change the human soul, preparing it for possible death in battle. Finally, the *jihad* fosters the moral reform of the entire human community which, through the sacrifice of its fighters, proves that Islam is called to lead all of humankind. Fighters who fall in battle are martyrs of the faith: they are sustainers of God, not because they have proved their loyalty to Him on the battlefield by sacrificing their lives, but because they have acted out the law of God; fighting for God (*jihad*) has no other aim but God Himself: to impose the divine order on the earthly world. . . Therefore the martyrs of the faith do not really die; they continue to live, only changing their form of life, like Jesus, son of Mary, who did not really die on the cross."[10]

Naturally, such a conception of the Muslim as warrior of God, ready to sacrifice his life for the triumph of the faith, postulates the presence of an absolute enemy. In the ideological construction of the fundamentalists, America is seen as the "capital of the devil," which uses its media power to disseminate the immoral habits of the lay society. It is not only a "society without God," materialistic in its innermost fibre: it is also the Great Satan who wants to dominate the world. Its planetary expansion signifies spreading unbelief and therefore the regression of humanity to the state of darkness and impiety previous to the Koranic Revelation. Against the West which, having turned its back on God, has taken the "road of nothingness," Islamic fundamentalism launches a revolutionary call to arms to destroy the values and institutions of Western civilization perceived – and stigmatized – as a collective form of life dominated by "Satanic forces." It goes without saying that what Mark Juergensmeyer has called the "satanization of the enemies of Islam"[11] – of America and its allies, including the "apostate" governments which, albeit declaring themselves to be Muslim, have actually started to imitate the degrading lifestyle of the impious Godless society – not only legitimizes the terroristic use of violence. It also sanctifies it, transforming it into a divine commandment. In

10. Khaled Fouad Allam, "L'Islam contemporaneo," in Giovanni Filoramo, ed., *L'Islam* (Bari: Laterza, 2000), pp. 271-272.

11. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 201.

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addition, it inserts it within the framework of an eschatological war of planetary dimensions and cosmic-historical significance. Walter Laqueur has rightly observed that, compared to traditional terrorism, religious terrorism does not aim "at clearly defined political demands but at the destruction of society and the elimination of large sections of the population. In its most extreme form, this new terrorism intends to liquidate all satanic forces, which may include the majority of a country or of mankind, as a precondition for the growth of another, better, and in any case different breed of human. In its maddest, most extreme form it may aim at the destruction of all life on earth, as the ultimate punishment for mankind's crimes."[12]

III

When *The Clash of Civilizations*[13] was published in 1995, the "politically correct" intelligentsia accused its author, Samuel Huntington, of being an active ideologist for the preventive war against Islam. Yet, Huntington had simply observed that a spiritual force, Islamic fundamentalism, had appeared with the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979. This force not only wanted to purify the *Dar al-Islam* from the contaminating presence of Western values and customs but also to fight a battle of planetary dimensions to free people from what the Ayatollah Khomeini had called the "the Great Satan's prison." A spiritual force that already in the Eighties had started to spread outside Iran, generating a galaxy of sects and movements determined to wage a holy war against the materialistic "Godless society." This is very clear in the statements of the Algerian Abbasi Madani, leader of the National Liberation Front: "The moral crisis is the logical and inevitable consequence of laicism and materialism. This paradox, established and imposed on humanity by the blind and limping West, has caused a profound rupture between revelation and reason. Because the West has denied the revelation, venerated reason and adored matter. . . . It is Islam which has freed us from Rome. Today Islam is our compass to free us from the intellectual attempts of the West: Islam remains our shield in the great clash between civilizations. . . . You cannot

12. Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 81.

13. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995). Permit me to recall that I had anticipated Huntington's thesis in my article "The Cultural War between East and West," in *Telos* 89 (Fall 1991), pp. 127-137.

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engage in such a great battle without a reference civilization."[14] Even more radical is the statement by sheik Omar Bakri Muhammad, founder of the *Hezb al-Tahir* (Islamic Liberation Party) based in London: "American people must reconsider their foreign policy or their children will be sent back to them in coffins. . . . The existence of Israel is a crime. Israel must be eliminated. . . . It is our duty to work to establish an Islamic State in every part of the world, even in Great Britain."[15]

The profound reasons of the insurgence of Islamist movements and their determination to fight the war against the West with every means, including terrorism, become clear in the light of the cultural aggression theory set out by Arnold Toynbee in the eighth volume of his opus magnum, *A Study of History*.[16] This theory stresses that the radioactive power of modern civilization is so great that it subjects other civilizations to a kind of cultural bombardment that alters their traditional forms of life and causes a painful crisis of identity. This was expressed perfectly in an article appearing in 1930 in the authoritative Egyptian review *Al-Fath*: "Considered as a whole, the territory dominated by colonialism is not large; the day will come in which the owner of the land will be able to recover what has been stolen from him. But that the invaders can colonize the hearts of men and women is the greatest damage, the final catastrophe. The real danger comes from the spiritual war that Europe methodically conducts against the soul of Orientals in general and Muslims in particular, with the aid of its philosophical works, its novels, its theatre, its films and its language. The aim of this concerted action is psychological: to tear eastern peoples away from their past."[17]

And everything has occurred as *Al-Fath* predicted: political-military colonialism is no more, but cultural colonialism, which constitutes a permanent threat for the soul of the oriental population, is still very much with us. Nor could it have been otherwise, since modern Western civilization has an objective imperialistic vocation: thanks to its formidable communication means – first of all television and internet, it is able to spread practically anywhere, demolishing frontiers and penetrating deeply into the daily life of its "external proletariat." The people of the *Dar al-Islam* have to cope with an alien culture that tends to submerge them with its

14. Allam, *L'Islam contemporaneo*, *op. cit.*, p. 284.
15. Cf. Guido Olimpio, *La rete del terrore* (Milan: Serplin e Kupfer, 2002), p. 49.
16. Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).
17. G. E. von Grunebaum, *L'identité culturelle de l'Islam* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 166.

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impressive flow of techniques, goods, messages, images, symbols and values. The result is a widespread dissemination of the spiritual core of modernity, secularization, that is, the "disenchantment of the world," which is a deadly poison for the faith. This is why Muslims feel besieged by a power with a limitless desire for expansion and dominion that strikes at the heart of their cultural identity, comprised of religion, a religion that is a total conception, a universal vocation, involving all aspects of life, a religion which does not tolerate any rivals whatsoever. It is *Kalam Allah* – the voice of God – and as such requires that all physical and moral things be subjected to its jurisdiction. Sovereignity belongs exclusively to God, so that those who abandon the law of God for another made by men commit an inexcusable act of idolatry, which has to be severely punished.

It is hardly necessary to point out that, in this concept of the revelation, the idea of a distinction between the sacred and the profane is inconceivable; just as the separation between religion and politics, one of the characteristics of modern civilization, is inconceivable. For orthodox Muslims, the State can only be a confessional State, a State which ensures that the word of God is respected and which uses all its formidable resources to fight idolatry wherever it lurks. Furthermore since the imperialistic aggression of the Great Satan is spreading idolatry not only in the Western world but also in the *Dar al-Islam*, the "true believers" have a mission of spiritual purification and moral regeneration that practically involves the entire world, subjected to the "satanic forces" that attempt to entice people away from the "way of Allah." It is not therefore surprising that Alexandre Del Valle has defined the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as the "third totalitarianism."[18] Its objective is the same as that behind the Communist and the national-socialist revolutions: the elimination, on a planetary scale, of the values and institutions of the secular city, whose presence can only be seen by fundamentalists as both encroaching and contaminating. So they are encouraged by the certainty that their religion "is really a universal declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men and from servitude to his own desires, which is also a form of human servitude; it is a declaration that sovereignty belongs to God alone and that He is the Lord of all the worlds," and that it is "a declaration of total war against every human power, a conflict without quarter initiated wherever men have seized power in one form or another and therefore where some kind of idolatry is practised. . . Islam proclaims that the

18. Alexandre Del Valle, *Le totalitarisme islamiste* (Paris: Editions des Sirtes, 2002).

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usurped authority of God be returned to Him and the usurpers be thrown out, that is those who by themselves devise laws for others to follow, thus elevating themselves to the status of lords and reducing others to the status of slaves. In short, it means destroying all human kingship to build the kingdom of God on Earth."[19]

Certainly, the *jihad* activists are only a tiny minority; but it is indisputable that they express and interpret the Muslims' widespread resentment towards the West. And this is because their reaction is not a mere manifestation of fanaticism, but the violent response of a world which, afflicted by the cultural radiation of the "imperialistic" modern civilization, realizes that its own spiritual identity is at stake. A world which, after having proclaimed the moral superiority of its own way of life imperatively fixed by the Koranic Revelation, closes up like a clam in the *Sharia*, in a desperate attempt to prevent its soul being taken over by the last *avatara* of paganism: the secular City.

IV

Since it can make use of weapons of mass destruction, global terrorism can create a situation of permanent emergency with disastrous prospects, and to tackle it the legal system of the liberal democracies risks being profoundly changed. It is highly probable that the emergency measures governments will be induced to take to combat international terrorism will cause restrictions in civil liberties and rights. And they will not be temporary restrictions, because in an asymmetrical war such as that unleashed by Al Qaeda, there is neither a "return ticket" nor a date from which it will be possible to say that it is over. The temptation to use exceptional measures to guarantee collective safety occurred immediately after the 9/11 attack. The American Attorney General John Ashcroft announced a policy of "aggressive detention," where any individual suspected of links with the terrorists would be arrested even for non-serious offences and interned indefinitely. President George W. Bush also requested that non-American nationals suspected of links with terrorism be dealt with by military tribunals, a request with very serious consequences, given that one of the guidelines of military justice is that all those who, for one reason or another, are suspected of nourishing an intent to cause damage to the US can be taken and held in a detentioncamp. Another typical military justice guideline is that proof obtained by illegal

19. Citing Sayyid Qutb, in Paolo Branca, ed., *Voci dell'Islam moderno* (Genoa: Marietti, 1997), p. 198.

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searches can be taken into consideration and even confessions extorted by using particularly severe physical and mental pressures. That means that, in the hands of the military authorities, the ethical and judicial principles on which the modern civilization of rights and freedoms is based are seriously endangered and can even be systematically crushed. Particularly at risk is the prohibition of the use of torture: a prohibition solemnly sanctioned by the Geneva Convention, signed by all the liberal-democratic states and thus having the value of law.

The US has adopted the Convention but with a specific reservation: that it is only to be considered binding insofar as it is consistent with the Eighth Amendment. Moreover, some judgements issued by have declared that the Eighth Amendment does not prohibit torture whenever it is used to save human lives.[20] Thus, the agencies appointed to guarantee national security could be given the discretionary power to use extreme methods and means. This is a power, moreover, already virtually recognized, if it is true – and it is true – that for years the CIA has been "returning" captured terrorists to friendly states in which torture is widely used, while the White House adopts the "not seeing, not hearing" policy. That constitutes yet another confirmation of a historical constant: that in a society which feels threatened by enemies (internal or external), temptations and practices emerge in clear contrast to the axiological heart of Western civilization, which is the culture of rights. This is amply demonstrated by the use of torture authorized by French governments during the colonial war fought in Algeria in the second half of the 1950s, by the brutal procedures used by prison guards in Northern Ireland triggered by the *Prevention of Terrorism Act* (1974), and by those, equally damaging to human rights, which the State of Israel uses in its daily actions against the *Hamas* and *Al Aqsa* suicide bombers.

It is only natural that the trauma of 9/11 would reignite public debate on the lawfulness of torture against the threat constituted by the existence in American society of a vast reservoir of potential terrorists. Two months after the attack on the Twin Towers the FBI announced that, because of current legal constraints, it was impossible to obtain information from those arrested. It was also announced that, in this situation, the use of extraordinary methods would sooner or later be inevitable. This had in any case already occurred in the past. In all situations of national emergency, American governments have felt authorized to violate the principles of the

20. See Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-163.

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legal system. Moreover they have done it with public opinion behind them, even in some cases with opinion-makers calling for the implementation of exceptional measures. It is thus not surprising that, at the end of 2001, the *Wall Street Journal* published an editorial in which "the excesses of the criminal legal system in force in the United States" were criticized, with the strict "admissibility of evidence" and the "laws for excluding unlawful evidence." Hence the preoccupation expressed by many jurists and philosophers that one of the consequences of the war against terrorism could be the institutionalization — *de facto*, if not actually *de jure* — of practices that not only threaten the moral principles underpinning Western civilization, but also civil liberties. For example, there is the monitoring of private communications, so easy with contemporary sophisticated technologies. This would mean the materialization of Big Brother, who controls, sees and hears everything; and who can also imprison, condemn and even torture those who, in his unquestionable opinion, constitute a danger to collective security. Faced with this worrisome prospect, the famous American attorney Alan M. Dershowitz, after having recalled that the "road to tyranny has always been paved with claims of necessity made by those responsible for the security of a nation,"[21] invited his fellow Americans to bear constantly in mind the response given by general Alberto Dalla Chiesa to those who suggested torturing the Red Brigade members in prison to save the life of Aldo Moro: "Italian democracy can survive the loss of Moro but it cannot survive the introduction of torture."

21. Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

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Matthias Küntzel

"Listen!" says a Rabbi to a young Jew. "We have received an order from above. We need the blood of a Christian child for the unleavened bread for the Pesach [Passover] feast." In the following shot, a terrified youngster is seized from the neighborhood. Then the camera zooms in on the child for a close-up of his throat being cut. The blood spurts from the wound and pours into a metal basin.

The *Al-Manar* satellite channel which broadcast this is run by the Islamist Hizbollah ("Party of God"). The bloodthirsty scene is part of a 29-part series entitled *Al-Shatat* ("Diaspora") produced by *Al-Manar* with Syrian government backing and broadcast for the first time during Ramadan in 2003. Episode by episode, the series peddles the fantasy of the Jewish world conspiracy: Jews have brought death and destruction upon humanity, Jews unleashed both world wars, Jews discovered chemical weapons and destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki with nuclear bombs.

With a permanent staff of 300, this channel is the most effective in the Arab-Islamic world after *Al-Jazeera*. Ten million people a day tune in to the round-the-clock broadcasts from Beirut. *Al-Manar* ("the Beacon") is the first and to date only satellite channel which, not even pretending to objectivity, sees itself as the global voice of Islamism. Its popularity is due to its countless video clips, which use inspiring graphics and uplifting music to promote suicide bombing. *Al-Manar* does not only push for terrorist acts against Israel, but inspires, justifies and acclaims them.[2]

1. Translated from German by Colin Meade.

2. See Avi Jorisch, "Al-Manar: Hizbollah TV," in *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2004). See also Lisbeth Rausing, "Frequenzen des Hasses. Wie die Hisbollah ihre Mordpropaganda nach Europe trägt," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) (March 2004).

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Despite this, three months after the broadcast of the *Al-Shatat* series, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, a think-tank with close ties to the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the Hizbollah's "research department" organized a joint conference in Beirut entitled "the Islamic world and Europe: from Dialogue to Agreement." Just as remarkable as the alliance between the think-tanks of a German governing party and an Islamist terror organization was the conference agenda, which included an item on "occupation and resistance," but nothing on *Al-Manar*'s anti-semitic agitation.[3]

This casual attitude toward Islamist Jew-hatred is typical of the discourse in Europe. While the right-wing anti-Semitism of politicians like Jean-Marie Le Pen in France or the member of the German *Bundestag* Martin Hohmann provokes public indignation, when Muslims express exactly the same anti-Semitism it is often ignored or played down as an alleged reaction to the Middle East conflict. This silence regarding Islamist anti-Semitism persists alongside an accompanying silence over its roots in National Socialism. Or have you ever heard of the short-wave transmitter at Zeesen?

In Zeesen, a town with some 4,000 inhabitants to the south of Berlin, once stood one of the world's most powerful short-wave transmitters. From 1939 onwards, it broadcast its daily Arabic-language program. Of all the foreign-language services, the Oriental Service had "absolute priority. It reached out to Arabs, Turks, Persians and Indians and had an 80-strong staff, including freelance announcers and translators."[4] Between 1939 and 1945, at a time when, in the Arab world, listening to the radio took place primarily in public squares or bazaars and coffee houses, no other station was more popular than the Nazi Zeesen service, which skillfully mingled anti-Semitic propaganda with quotations from the Koran and Arabic music. WWII allies were presented as lackeys of the Jews and the picture of the "United Jewish Nations" drummed into the audience. At the same time, the Jews were attacked as the worst enemies of Islam. "The Jew since the time of Mohammed has never been a friend of the

3. Along with the FES and the Hizbollah Consultative Centre for Studies and Documentation, the Deutsche Orient-Institut Beirut and the University of Birmingham's Centre for the Study of Islam were also involved in organizing the conference, held on February 17-19, 2004. See Thomas von der Osten-Sacken and Thomas Uwer, "Verständnisvolles Europa," in *Jungle World* (February 11, 2004).

4. Werner Schwipps, "Wortschlacht im Äther," in Deutsche Welle (ed.), *Wortschlacht im Äther, Der deutsche Auslandsrundfunk im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Haude und Spener, 1971), p. 58.

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Muslim, the Jew is the enemy and it pleases Allah to kill him."[5] Today, this same message is being put out on satellite by Hizbollah's *Al-Manar* TV channel. So what are the historic connections between the short-wave transmitter in Zeesen and the Beirut satellite channel?

National-Socialist Propaganda

A highlight of Radio Zeesen's output were the calls for *jihad* by the most popular figure in the Arab-Islamic world of the time, the Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini (1895-1974). From 1941 onward, he lived in Berlin, supervising Arabic radio broadcasting out of Zeesen, Athens and Rome.[6] Nobody promoted hatred of Jews among Muslims more effectively than the Mufti. The European responsibility for this is clear: El-Husseini had after all been appointed to and promoted in office by European powers. It was the British who, having first sentenced him to ten years in jail for anti-Jewish incitement in 1920, then amnestied him in 1921 and made him Mufti against the will of the majority of Palestinians. It was the Germans who paid him for his services between 1937 and 1945. And it was the French who in 1946, when the Mufti was being pursued internationally as a Nazi war criminal, helped him escape to Egypt and continue his activities.[7]

Nobody had a greater influence on the early history of the Middle East conflict than the Mufti, who as President of the Supreme Muslim Council, was not only the supreme religious authority, but also the central figure in Palestine nationalism. In the 1930s, there were countless Arab nationalists who viewed Nazi Germany as an ally against the British without concerning themselves with the nature of the Hitler regime. Things were different where the Mufti was concerned: he knew what that regime

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5. Seth Arsenian, "Wartime Propaganda in the Middle East," in *The Middle East Journal* 4 (October 1948), Vol. II, p. 421; Robert Melka, *The Axis and the Arab Middle East 1930-1945* (University of Minnesota, 1966), pp. 47ff; Heinz Tillmann, *Deutschlands Arabpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1965), pp. 83ff. According to Arsenian and Melka, Arabic broadcasting from Zeesen began in 1938.

6. Nicholas Bethell, *Das Palästina-Dreieck, Juden und Araber im Kampf um das britische Mandat 1935 bis 1948* (Frankfurt am Main: Propyläen, 1979), p. 240. According to Bethell, El-Husseini was the "Leiter" ("Director") of this station, while according to Hurewitz the Mufti was a Director of the "Arab Bureau" in Berlin, which was responsible for the preparation and transmission of the Arabic broadcasts, under the supervision of Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry. See Jacob Coleman Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine* (New York: Schocken, 1951), p. 154.

7. Klaus Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini und die Nationalsozialisten* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), p. 251.

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was about and was attracted to it for that very reason.

As early as spring 1933, he assured the German consul in Jerusalem that "the Muslims inside and outside Palestine welcome the new regime of Germany and hope for the extension of the fascist, anti-democratic governmental system to other countries."[8] The youth organization of the party established by the Mufti operated for a time under the name Nazi Scouts and adopted Hitler Youth-style shorts and leather belts. During the 1936-1939 Palestinian revolt, the swastika was used as a mark of identity: Arabic leaflets and graffiti were liberally decorated with it, Arab children welcomed each other with the Hitler salute and vast numbers of German flags and pictures of Hitler were displayed even at celebrations of Mohammed's birthday. Anyone obliged to travel through areas involved in the Palestinian revolt would attach a swastika to their vehicle to ward off attacks by Arab snipers.[9]

However, until the summer of 1937, this support was awkward for the Nazis. Berlin politely but firmly rejected the Arab offers of cooperation. While, on the one hand, Hitler had already stated his belief in the "racial inferiority" of the Arabs in *Mein Kampf* and contemptuously rejected their "Holy War,"[10] on the other, the Nazis were extremely anxious not to jeopardize British appeasement of Berlin prematurely by activities in the Middle East, especially since the Mediterranean fell within the sphere of responsibility of Germany's Italian ally.

Berlin revised this approach for the first time in June 1937. The trigger was the proposal from the British Peel Commission for the division of the Palestine Mandate Territory into a smaller Jewish and a larger Muslim-Arab state. The formation of a Jewish state "is not in Germany's interest," was the instant response of Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath, since a Palestinian state "would create an additional position of power under international law for international Jewry. Germany therefore has an interest in strengthening the Arab world as a counterweight against

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8. Yehuda Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement. From Riots to Rebellion*, Vol. II, 1929-1939 (London: Cass, 1977), p. 76.

9. Ralf Balke, *Die Landesgruppe der NSDAP in Palästina*, thesis (Düsseldorf: 1997), pp. 214 and 216; Tillmann, *Deutschlands Araberpolitik*, *op. cit.*, p. 78; Francis R. Nicosia, *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), p. 98. See also Iwo Jordan, *Araberaufstand. Erlebnisse und Dokumente aus Palästina* (Vienna and Leipzig: Braunmüller Verlag, 1943), pp. 3 and 97. Jordan reprints an example of an Arab-Palestinian leaflet with swastikas.

10. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich, 1934), p. 747.

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such a possible increase in power for world Jewry."[11]

Strengthening the Arabs against the Jews – it is true that Berlin initially pursued this new course surreptitiously, lest it alienate London. However, the scale of the operations now set in motion was nonetheless impressive. Students from Arab countries received German scholarships, firms took on Arab apprentices, and Arab party leaders were invited to the Nuremberg party rallies and military chiefs to Wehrmacht manoeuvres. An "Arab Club" was established in Berlin as the center for Palestine-related agitation and Arabic-language broadcasting.[12]

Under the direction of the German Propaganda Ministry, the German News Agency *Deutsche Nachrichtenbüro* (DNB), whose regional headquarters in Jerusalem had set up an Arab service in 1936, stepped up its work. The head of DNB-Jerusalem, Dr Franz Reichert, who had excellent links not only with the Mufti, but also with the Arabic press, bribed journalists and brought dissident newspapers back on board with lucrative advertising orders.

In September 1937, two members of the Jewish Department of the SS secret service (*Sicherheitsdienst* — SD), including Adolf Eichmann, carried out a exploratory mission in the Middle East lasting several weeks. Extended visits by the leader of the Hitler Youth, Baldur von Schirach, and the head of the *Abwehr* (counter-intelligence service), Wilhelm Canaris, followed. Finally, in April 1939, the head of the Foreign Office's Oriental Department, Otto von Hentig, also spent time in Palestine and Egypt. This activism was not without results: von Schirach donated the money for the establishment of an "Arab Club" in Damascus in which German Nazis trained recruits for the Mufti's insurgents and Canaris covered the region with a spy network.[13]

The most effective tool, however, was the Arabic-language broadcasting out of Zeesen, "our long-range gun in the ether," as Goebbels dubbed it. It began regular service on April 25, 1939, transmitting daily at 5:45 pm Berlin time.[14] It ridiculed any Arab wishing to negotiate

11. Tillmann, *Deutschlands Araberpolitik*, *op. cit.*, p. 66. Italy did not seem reliable enough for the anti-Jewish project. In the last analysis, according to the German Foreign Ministry, Italy's rejection of the Peel plan was motivated "less by anti-Semitic animosity than by fear that Britain might make the foundation of a Jewish state in Palestine the basis of its Mediterranean policy." See Melka, *The Axis and the Arab Middle East*, *op.cit.*, pp. 70.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

13. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine*, *op. cit.*, p. 87; Balke, *Die Landesgruppe*, *op. cit.*, p. 204; Melka, *The Axis and the Arab Middle East*, *op.cit.*, pp. 48ff; Michael Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat from the Mandate* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1978), p. 58; Lukasz Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 54.

14. Information from Gerhard Damm, Zeesen. According to Arsenian and Melka, Zeesen's Arabic service in fact began broadcasting at the start of 1938.

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with the Zionists. "The Berlin radio announcer, for instance, used regularly to refer to the Amir Abdallah as 'Rabbi Abdallah,'" reported Nevill Barbour, later a BBC reporter. "It was therefore not easy to counter Nazi propaganda on the subject of the Jewish National Home in Palestine."[15] But Radio Zeesen was also hard to combat because it had no scruples about mobilizing anti-Western antipathies: with its pro-Arab shift, Berlin had discovered the anti-modernist potential of Islam.

The Anti-Semitism of the Mufti

It was not only Heinrich Himmler who waxed lyrically about the "ideological closeness" of National Socialism and Islam, coining the concept of "*Muselgermanen*" ("Muslim-Germans").[16] Amin el-Husseini too referred to the parallels between Muslim and German ideals, identifying the following points of contact: 1. Monotheism — unity of leadership; 2. The ordering power — obedience and discipline; 3. The struggle and the honor of falling in battle; 4. Community; 5. Family and offspring; 6. Glorification of work and creativity; 7. Attitude to the Jews — "in the struggle against Jewry, Islam and National Socialism come very close to one another."[17]

However, precisely this last point was by no means self-evident. Racialist anti-Semitism and the fantasy of the Jewish world conspiracy were of European origin and foreign to the original Islamic view of the Jews. Only in the Christ legend did the Jews appear as a deadly and powerful force who allegedly went so far as to kill God's only son.

Islam tells quite a different story. Here it was not the Jews who murdered the Prophet, but the Prophet who murdered the Jews: in the years between 623 and 627 Mohammed enslaved, expelled or killed all the Jewish tribes of Medina. As a result, the characteristic features of Christian anti-Semitism did not arise in the Muslim world. "There were no fears of Jewish conspiracy and domination, no charges of diabolic evil. Jews were not accused of poisoning wells or spreading the plague."[18] Instead, the Jews were treated with contempt or condescending tolerance. This cultural inheritance made the idea that the Jews of all people could represent

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15. Nevill Barbour, "Broadcasting to the Arab World. Arabic Transmissions from the BBC and Other Non-Arab Stations," in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. V (Winter 1951), p. 65. Emir Abdallah, the ruler of Transjordan, was murdered in 1951 by one of the Mufti's thugs for trying to reach an understanding with Israel.

16. Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem. . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

17. Speech by the Mufti to the Imams of the Bosniak SS Division, cited in Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem. . . op. cit.*, p. 207.

18. See Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites* (London: Norton, 1986), p. 122.

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a permanent danger for the Muslims and the world seem absurd.

This insane idea had therefore to be hammered into the Arab-Islamic world all the more forcefully. The conflict over immigration and land ownership in Palestine was not the reason, but merely an opportunity for its spread. Thus, for example, the pamphlet on "Islam and Jewry" distributed by the Nazis to Muslim members of the "Handzar" Bosniak SS division talked about an "ancient enmity," while Radio Zeesen evoked in ever new variations the theme of the "eternal enemy, the Jew." A speech given by the Mufti in November 1943 is typical: "This people has been the enemy of the Arabs and Islam since it came into being. The Holy Koran expressed this old enmity in the following words: 'you will find that the most hostilely-disposed towards the believers are the Jews.' They tried to poison the praiseworthy Prophet, put up resistance to him, were filled with hostility to him and plotted against him. This was the case over 1300 years ago. Since then, they have never ceased to hatch plots against the Arabs and Mohammedans."[19] Thus an eternal threat to all Muslims was concocted from Mohammed's defeated contemporaries.

For the Mufti, the reference back to the 7th century fitted the bill for a second reason: his hatred of the Jews was a declaration of war on the "invasion of liberal ideas" into the world of Islam. Since the start of the 20th century, Egypt had been opening up to the outside world, in the 1920s Turkey replaced the Caliphate with the Atatürkist model, and Reza Khan too was pushing forward the secularization of Iran. The Mufti made not the slightest concession to this reformist trend in his sphere of control. He saw Jerusalem as the crystallization point for the "rebirth of Islam" and Palestine as the center from whence resistance to the Jews and the modern world was destined to emanate. Speaking at a religious conference in 1935, the Mufti complained: "The cinema, the theatre and some shameless magazines enter our houses and courtyards like adders, where they kill morality and demolish the foundation of society." The Jews were blamed for this alleged corruption of moral values, as demonstrated by another statement of Amin el-Husseini: "They [i.e. the Jews] have also spread here their customs and usages which are opposed to our religion

19. This speech of the Mufti's on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration is reprinted in Gerhard Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere. Briefe, Memoranden, Reden und Aufrufe Amin al-Husainis aus dem Exil, 1940-1945* (Bern: Schwarz, 1966), pp. 192ff. The quotation from the Koran is from the 82nd verse of the 5th Sura. The pamphlet "Islam and Judentum" can be found in Thomas Casagrande, *Die Volksdeutsche SS-Division "Prinz Eugen"* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2003), p. 333.

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and to our whole way of life. The Jewish girls who run around in shorts demoralize our youth by their mere presence."[20]

El-Husseini tirelessly used his office to Islamize anti-Zionism and provide a religious rationale for hatred of Jews. Anyone who failed to accept his guidelines would be denounced by name in the Mosque during Friday prayers, excluded from the rites of marriage and burial or physically threatened. The Mufti implemented this policy in alliance with his most prominent Palestinian ally of the time, the Islamic fundamentalist Izz al-Din al-Qassam, whose name is borne by Hamas' suicide bombing units. Al-Qassam was the first Sheikh of modern times who, in 1931, set up a movement in the Haifa region which united the ideology of a devout return to the original Islam of the 7th century with the practice of militant *jihad* against the infidels.[21]

The unrest which began in 1936 and which has gone down in history as the "Arab revolt" was the first testing ground for the forming Islamist ideology. Here for the first time those terrorist methods to which Muslims in Algeria, Afghanistan and Iran would later be exposed were employed.

Nucleus of Islamism

The "Arab revolt," which continued in stages until the start of WWII, began between April and October 1936 as a strike movement against Jewish immigration and British rule.[22] The second phase developed in autumn 1937 after the publication of the Peel Plan on the division of Palestine. At this point, German foreign policy intervened decisively. "The Mufti himself said that it was at that time only because of German money that it had been possible to carry through the uprising in Palestine. From the outset he made major financial demands which the Nazis in very large measure met."[23]

From now on, the character of the unrest was determined by the Mufti

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20. Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council. Islam under the British Mandate for Palestine* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), pp. 249 and 252.

21. On Izz al-Din al-Qassam see Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement, op. cit.*, pp. 133. In November 1935, al-Qassam became the first victim of the death cult he promoted, when he was killed in a skirmish with the British and has since been revered as a martyr.

22. David Thomas Schiller, *Palästinenser zwischen Terrorismus und Diplomatie* (Munich: Bernard und Graefe, 1982), p. 123ff.

23. According to Gensicke in his important study of the Mufti, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem. . ., op. cit.*, pp. 233ff. The most detailed accounts of the uprising are to be found in Schiller, *Palästinenser zwischen Terrorismus und Diplomatie*, *op. cit.*, and Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, *op. cit.*

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and the supporters of Sheikh al-Qassam. In the zones "liberated" from the Jews and British, new dress codes and Sharia law were brutally enforced and numerous "unislamic" deviationists liquidated. A German biographer of the Mufti reported admiringly in 1943 on the shooting of Palestinian Arabs who resisted the pressure to submit by refusing to wear the Kaffiyah.[24] No less draconian were the means used to force Arab Christian women and all other women to wear the veil.

Alongside the Jews and the British, Palestinians who sought compromises with Zionism and the Mandatory power and supported the Peel Plan were also targeted. "Sellers of land to the Jews, holders of moderate political views and those whose nationalism was generally suspected," reports Porath, "were not always immediately murdered; sometimes they were kidnapped and taken to the mountainous areas under rebel control. There they were thrown into pits infested with snakes and scorpions. After spending a few days there, the victims, if still alive, were brought before one of the rebel courts and usually sentenced to death, or, as a special dispensation, to severe flogging. The terror was so strong that no one, including *ulama* and priests, dared to perform the proper burial services."[25] The unrest culminated in autumn 1938. El-Husseini now had some 10,000 fighters (including 3,000 professional soldiers) at his disposal. The most important commands were in the hands of the "Qassamites," while the Mufti directed the revolt from Beirut.[26] Dr Reichert from the Intelligence Bureau had several meetings with representatives of the insurgents and repeatedly emphasized that "on the basis of the Third Reich's undertakings to Haj Amin el-Husseini the Arab nationalists will soon have sufficient financial resources for the continuation of their rebellion."[27]

Why did the Nazis want to prolong the unrest? The most important reason was expressed by Alfred Rosenberg, head of the NSDAP's foreign

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24. Kurt Fischer-Weth, *Amin el-Husseini. Grossmufti von Palästina* (Berlin, 1943), p. 83. How the Kaffiyah, which was permanently worn by Arafat, could become the badge of identity of today's "progressives" deserves a study on its own.

25. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 183. After the failed British attempt to arrest el-Husseini in July 1937, he fled in October to Beirut from where, with a few hundred acolytes who had come with him, he continued to direct the uprising. See Melka, *The Axis and the Arab Middle East*, *op.cit.*, pp. 106ff. Cohen, *Retreat from the Mandate*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

27. Again in May 1939 British officials reported that "DNB agents are currently undertaking an intensive propaganda campaign in Palestine for a resumption of the rebellion in alliance with the Husseini circle." DNB agents had stated "that huge sums of money were available to ensure that the rebellion continued and that machine guns have been brought into the country for the rebellion." Balke, *Die Landesgruppe . . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. 205 and 207.

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policy department. "The longer the fire continues to burn in Palestine," he prophesied in December 1938, "the stronger becomes the resistance to the Jewish regime of violence in all the Arab states and beyond that in the other Muslim countries too."[28] Indeed! It was, for example, the fighting in Palestine which first turned the core organization of Islamism, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928, into that influential organization from whose ranks not only Hamas, but also Osama bin Laden's "World Islamic Front for *jihad* Against Jews and Crusaders" would later issue. While in 1936 the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood had a mere 800 members, by 1938 it already had 200,000. In the intervening period it had undertaken only one campaign: the mobilization behind the Mufti-led revolt in Palestine.[29]

The Anti-Semitism of the Muslim Brotherhood

Before 1936, there could be no talk of anti-Semitism in Egypt. Jews were well-regarded by the population and were influential in economic and political life. The anti-Jewish pamphlets which the NSDAP's local group in Cairo attempted to disseminate therefore fell on deaf ears. In 1933 in a letter to Berlin the group recommended that further leaflets and pamphlets would be of no avail and that instead attention had to be turned to where "real conflicts of interests between Arabs and Jews exist: Palestine. The conflict between Arabs and Jews there must be transplanted into Egypt."[30]

Three years later, this is what happened. In May 1936, immediately after the start of the Palestinian revolt, the Muslim Brotherhood called for a boycott of all Jewish businesses in Egypt. In mosques and factories, the rumour was spread that the Jews and British were destroying the holy places of Jerusalem. Further false reports of hundreds of killed Arab women and children circulated.

After the publication of the Peel Plan, the anti-Jewish agitation was stepped up. Cries of "Down with the Jews," "Jews out of Egypt and Palestine" rang out on violent student demonstrations in Cairo, Alexandria and

28. Alfred Rosenberg, "Die Judenfrage im Weltkampf," in Alfred Rosenberg, *Tradition und Gegenwart, Reden und Aufsätze 1936-1940, Blut und Ehre*, IV. Band (Munich, 1943), p. 208.

29. Abd Al-Fattah Muhammad El-Awaisi, *The Muslim Brothers and the Palestinian Question 1928-1947* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998), p. 98. For the links between the Islamism of the 1930s and that of the present day, see Matthias Küntzel, *Djihad und Judenhass* (Freiburg: Ca ira, 2002).

30. Gudrun Krämer, *Minderheit, Millet, Nation? Die Juden in Ägypten 1914-1952* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1982), p. 278. Since 1926, Alfred Hess, brother of Hitler's deputy to be, had been building up the NSDAP group in Egypt. See Küntzel, *Djihad und Judenhass*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

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Tanta. A column entitled "the menace of the Jews of Egypt" was introduced in the Brotherhood's magazine, *Al-Nadhir*. In it were published the names and addresses of Jewish business proprietors and owners of allegedly Jewish newspapers from across the world, and all evils — from communism to brothels — were attributed to the "Jewish threat." In September 1938 the Brotherhood launched a call for people to wear and consume only goods produced in Islamic countries and in all the corners of Egypt to make themselves ready to embark on *jihad* to defend the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.[31]

Giselher Wirsing, a prominent journalist of the Third Reich, enthusiastically reported on the shockwaves which the "political earthquake center" in Palestine had created in Egypt. The Nazi journalist noted with satisfaction "a marked return to the religious traditions of Islam" and "a fierce hostility to Western liberalism. Recent developments in Egypt show how strongly this theocracy is able to revive itself after the first onrush of liberalism." Theocracy instead of democracy, Salafism instead of liberalism: the line of this SS man is obvious.[32]

Priority was now given to supporting the burgeoning Islamist movement in Egypt with Nazi funds. "Documents seized in the flat of Wilhelm Stellbogen, the Director of the German News Agency affiliated to the German Legation in Cairo, show that prior to October 1939 the Muslim Brothers received subsidies from his organisation. Stellbogen was instrumental in transferring these funds to the Brothers, which were considerably larger than the subsidies offered to other anti-British activists. These transfers appear to have been coordinated by Haj Amin el-Husseini and some of his Palestinian contacts in Cairo" reports Brynjar Lia in his monograph on the Muslim Brotherhood.[33] The contributions enabled the

31. Krämer, *Minderheit, Millet, Nation?, op. cit.*, pp. 290-292; El-Awaisi, *The Muslim Brotherhs and the Palestinian Question, op. cit.*, pp. 39, 70 and 92; Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement, op. cit.*, p. 199. On the resistance which this campaign at first encountered even in clerical circles, see Küntzel, *Djihad und Judenhass, op. cit.*, pp. 30ff.

32. Giselher Wirsing, *Engländer, Juden, Araber, in Palästina* (Jena: Diederichs, 1942), pp. 136ff. Wirsing visited Egypt and Palestine in 1936 and 1939 on behalf of the SS. See Otto Köhler, *Unheimliche Publizisten* (Munich: Knaur, 1995), pp. 290ff. Salafism (as-salaf as-salih = the pious forefathers) is the term used for the ideal of a return to the early Islam of the 7th century advocated by figures such as Hassan al-Banna and Izz al-Din al-Qassam.

33. Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1988), p. 175. The British secret service officer Seth Arsenian confirms this information: "Nazi agents also paid subversive groups, such as the Ikhwan al-Muslimun [the Muslim Brothers] in Egypt, to run propaganda against the British in Palestine." See Arsenian, "Wartime Propaganda in the Middle East," *op. cit.*, p. 425.

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Muslim Brotherhood to set up a printing plant with 24 employees and use the most up-to-date propaganda methods. For example, under the title "Fire and Destruction in Palestine" an 80-page pamphlet with fifty photos of alleged acts of violence and torture was produced and several tens of thousands of copies distributed among the populace.

The Muslim Brotherhood also, of course, enjoyed the assistance of German officers in the construction of their military organization and cooperated with Rommel's army in the Second World War. But they never admired the Nazis. For Hassan al-Banna, the founder and leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, there was no question of accepting a non-Muslim leader. "When they did express admiration of certain aspects of Nazism or Fascism, it was usually in the context of demonstrating that the Europeans had implemented some of 'the principles of Islam,' such as a modest dress code, encouragement of early marriage, a strong patriotism and a military *jihad* spirit."[34]

Thus did the years 1936 to 1939 shape Islamism as a new and independent, anti-Semitic and anti-modern mass movement. Until 1936 the moderate Arab forces, which welcomed or at least tolerated Zionism, had in no way been marginalized. This changed after the Nazis threw their weight behind the Islamists. They successfully spurred on the unrest in Palestine and so contributed to the spread of the idea that the Jews were the enemy to Egypt. The Islamist mass mobilization was financially and ideologically supported by Radio Zeesen and other means of propaganda. This was one of the reasons why it was the Islamism and anti-Semitism of Hassan al-Banna rather than the enlightened modernism of Kemal Atatürk which gained general acceptance in the Arab part of the Islamic world.[35]

The Zeesen short-wave transmitter turns out in retrospect to have been the interface which transferred the anti-Semitic ideology to the Arab world and linked early Arab Islamism with late Nazism. Radio Zeesen ceased operation in April 1945. But it was only after that date that its frequencies of hate really began to reverberate in the Arab world.

34. Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt*, *op. cit.*, pp. 80 and 180. The issues of the reciprocal contacts between Nazis and Muslim Brothers in WWII lies outside the scope of this article. On this matter, see John W. Eppler, *Rommel ruft Cairo* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1959), p. 165.

35. On the moderate tendencies, see Küntzel, *Djihad und Judenhass*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15, 24, 41 and 54. That Islamist anti-modernism is not automatically associated with the identity-based "The Jews are our misfortune" fantasy is shown by the example of the Islamist movement formed at the same time in South-East Asia. The moving spirit of this movement, Ala Maududi, was certainly anti-liberal and anti-feminist, but he did not adopt anti-Jewish conspiracy theories. See Martin Riexinger, "Allahs Kader," *taz-Magazin* (Jan. 24 2004).

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Brother Hitler

May 8, 1945 was followed by a twofold division of the world. The division between politico-economic systems is known as the Cold War. The second cleavage, merely covered over by the Cold War, has to do with the persistence of National Socialist modes of thought. In her report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, Hannah Arendt cast her gaze into this abyss: "the newspapers in Damascus and Beirut, in Cairo and Jordan did not conceal either their sympathy for Eichmann nor their regret that he 'did not finish the job'; a radio broadcast from Cairo on the opening day of the trial even included a little sideswipe at the Germans, reproaching them for the fact that 'in the last war, no German plane had ever flown over and bombed a Jewish settlement.'"[36] The same regret and heartfelt wish to see all Jews finally annihilated was expressed in April 2002 by a columnist in the second largest, state-controlled Egyptian daily *Al-Akhbar*. "The entire matter [the Holocaust], as many French and British scientists and researchers have proven, is nothing more than a huge Israeli plot aimed at extorting the German government in particular and the European countries in general. But I, personally and in light of this imaginary tale, complain to Hitler, even saying to him from the bottom of my heart, 'If only you had done it, brother, if only it had really happened, so that the world could sigh in relief [without] their evil and sin.'"[37]

The logic in the above is clear: the Jew is the source of evil in the world which must be destroyed. Israel therefore deserves to be erased from the map. And the Shoah is therefore no crime, but a failed attempt for which a more successful repetition is wished. Demonization of the Jews, legitimization of the Holocaust and the liquidation of Israel; three sides of an ideological triangle which cannot exist if any one of the three sides is missing. But why did this monstrous ideology find its most fertile place of exile in the Arab world after 1945?

Here the Mufti comes back into the picture. Openly and knowing about Auschwitz, he had advocated the Shoah. "Germany," he declared in 1943 has "decided to find a final solution to the Jewish menace,

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36. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 13.

37. Cited in the Middle East Research Institute (MEMRI), report no. 375, May 3, 2002. On Holocaust denial as a component of Arab average consciousness, see Küntzel, *Djihad und Judenhass*, *op. cit.*, pp. 51 and 116.

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which will end this misfortune in the world"[38] Nonetheless, the Mufti's reputation remained intact after 1945. He was, to be sure, personally responsible both for the atrocities committed by the Muslim SS division in Bosnia and for the deaths of thousands of Jewish children in the Holocaust.[39] However, in order not to fall out with the Arab world, the US and Britain refrained from prosecuting him, while France, in whose custody the Mufti had been since 1945, let him escape. When on June 10, 1946 the headlines of the world press announced the Mufti's "flight" from France, "the Arab quarters of Jerusalem and all the Arab towns and villages were garlanded and beflagged, and the great man's portrait was to be seen everywhere."[40] While amnestying the Mufti, the Allies also rehabilitated his anti-Semitism. Even more: the Arabs saw in the Mufti's impunity "not only a weakness of the Europeans, but also absolution for past and future occurrences," commented Simon Wiesenthal in 1947. Now the pro-Nazi past began to become "a source of pride, not shame."[41]

The opposed views of the Holocaust first clashed in November 1947 at the United Nations General Assembly. On the one side were those who considered the Shoah a fact and a catastrophe and were consequently in favor of the division of Palestine and the founding of Israel.[42] On the other side were those who saw in the UN decision a further example of the "Jewish world conspiracy." Among the latter was the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan Al-Banna, who "considered the whole United Nations intervention to be an international plot carried out by the Americans, the Russians and the British, under the influence of Zionism," while Amin el-Husseini, back in his role as spokesman for the Palestinians, believed that, instead of Palestine being divided into states, "the

38. Speech on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration (November 2, 1943), cited in Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere*, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

39. In 1943, the Mufti successfully prevented the implementation of a decision by the governments of Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary which at that time wished to permit the emigration of several thousand Jewish children to Israel. Instead of this, urged the Mufti, they should be "sent where they will be under closer control, for example to Poland." See *ibid.*, p. 164.

40. Daphne Trevor, *Under the White Paper* (Jerusalem, 1948), pp. 206ff. See also Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem. . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. 251ff, and Küntzel, *Djihad und Judenhass*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48ff and 146ff.

41. According to Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites*, *op. cit.*, p. 160 and Simon Wiesenthal, *Grossmufti — der Grossagent der Achse* (Vienna, 1947), p. 2.

42. On 29 November 1947 the UN General Assembly decided to divide Palestine into a Jewish state (56% of the mandate territory with 500,000 Jews and 500,000 Arab inhabitants) and an Arab state (43% of the territory, with 750,000 Arabs and 10,000 Jews) and place Jerusalem under international control.

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Arabs" should "together attack the Jews and destroy them as soon as the British forces have been withdrawn" from Palestine.[43]

No Arab head of state had the courage to contradict the popular Palestinian leader. And so the cynicism of the West, which left the Mufti undisturbed in 1946, and the opportunism of the Arabs paved the way for one of the most fateful turning points of the twentieth century: as Israel was founded on 14 May 1948, the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon invaded. The General Secretary of the Arab League, Abd al-Rahman Azzam, who had previously let it be known privately that he considered the division of Palestine the only rational solution, now stood shoulder to shoulder with the Mufti; "this war," he declared on the day of the Arab attack "will be a war of destruction."[44] The new state, to be sure, emerged victorious from this war, at a cost of 6,000 Israeli lives. Anti-Semitism however took on a new dimension. Gamal Abdul Nasser, whose 1952 putsch was a consequence of the Arab defeat, disseminated the central text of European anti-Semitism, *the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, in the Arab world. Moreover, Nasser employed many of the Nazi war criminals who had evaded justice through fleeing to Egypt in their former sphere of expertise - anti-Jewish propaganda.[45]

After Nasser's military campaign against Israel also failed miserably in the Six-Day War of 1967, the previously incited hate against Jews was radicalized into an Islamist direction. Nasser's anti-Jewish propaganda was still accompanied by a fondness for life's pleasures. Now anti-Semitism was mixed with the Islamists' hatred for sensuality and joy in life and — with reference to the *jihad* launched 30 years previously in Palestine — popularized as religious resistance against all "corrupters of the world." Now it was "discovered" that not only was everything Jewish

43. El-Awaisi, *The Muslim Brothers and the Palestinian Question*, *op. cit.*, p. 195 and Bethell, *Das Palästina-Dreieck, op. cit.*, p. 381.

44. Küntzel, *Djihad und Judenhass*, *op. cit.*, p. 46. In 1948, after el-Husseini had been appointed chairman of the Muslim Brothers in Palestine and the deputy of Hassan al-Banna, *The Magazine of the Year* wrote, "about one in every ten Arabs is a follower of the Mufti, and it is unwise to criticize Haj Amin in public." See Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem. . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 143. This was also the view of the Egyptian Premier, Sidqi Pasha, who had initially supported the partition plan. This instrumental reason, which today seems like a relic of a distant past, was documented in 1947 by the responsible representative of the Jewish Agency for the Arab world, Eliyahu Sasson: "According to Sasson's report, the prime minister repeatedly stressed that he is a businessman. He is neither pro-Jewish nor pro-Arab. He looks out for the welfare of Egypt. If that dictates Jewish-Arab understanding, so be it." Cited in Michael Doran, *Pan-Arabism before Nasser* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.99ff.

45. Küntzel, *Djihad und Judenhass*, *op. cit.*, pp. 70ff.

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evil, but that everything evil was Jewish. Thus, the most important manifesto of Islamist anti-Semitism, the essay "Our Struggle with the Jews" by the Muslim Brother Sayyid Qutb – distributed in millions of copies throughout the Islamic world with Saudi Arabian help — declares, with allusions to Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Emile Durkheim, that the Jews are responsible for the worldwide moral and sexual decline: "Behind the doctrine of atheistic materialism was a Jew; behind the doctrine of animalistic sexuality was a Jew; and behind the destruction of the family and the shattering of sacred relationships in society was a Jew."[46] Now Palestine was declared sacred Islamic territory (*Dar al-Islam*), where Jews should not be allowed to govern even a single village, and Israel's destruction a religious duty. Intellectual devastation now spread unimpeded: Jews started to be denigrated by reference to verses in the Koran as "pigs" and "apes," and the claim that the consumption of non-Jewish blood was a religious rite for Jews was offered up as a scientific discovery.[47] The greatest victims of the Islamist turn were the Muslims themselves. The "struggle against depravity" means the suppression of one's own sensual needs, and the return to "sacred social bonds" means the subjugation of women.

A further escalation took place in 1982 when Hizbollah began systematically to employ people as bombs. The hatred of Jews was now greater than the fear of death. The ideology of destruction turned into the practice of ripping any Jew to pieces. Whenever the possibility of a peaceful solution appeared on the horizon, it would be drowned in the blood of suicidal mass murders. The first major series of suicide bombings began in Palestine in 1993-1994, at precisely the moment when the Oslo peace process was under way. It was resumed in October 2000 after Israel withdrew from Lebanon and had made its most far-reaching

46. Qutb's text was written in 1950, but could not gain acceptance in the period of Nasser's bloody suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood, to which Qutb himself fell victim by hanging. See Ronald L. Nettler, "Past Trials and Present Tribulations: A Muslim Fundamentalist Speaks on the Jews," in Michael Curtis (ed.) *Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (Boulder: Westview, 1986), pp. 99ff.

47. This claim is found for example in the standard work on "The People of Israel in the Koran and the Sunna" by the most famous Sunni spiritual authority of today and Grand Iman of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Mohammed Tantawi, which he presented as a doctoral thesis and was published in 1968-69. See Wolfgang Driesch, *Islam, Judentum und Israel* (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 2003), pp. 53 and 74. The most recent edition of this bestseller appeared in 1997.

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concessions yet to the Palestinian side at Camp David.[48]

From Zeesen to Beirut: the international media campaign against the Jews, which began 60 years ago with a "long-range gun in the ether," is now being pursued in the form of instruction in close combat by satellite. The bloodier the massacres in Israel and Palestine, the higher the viewing figures for *Al-Manar* and the more successful the anti-Semitic mobilization in the Arab-Islamic world, in turn ensuring a further rise in the death toll in the Middle East conflict. This escalation strategy is not a response to any specific Israeli policy. Whatever the Israeli government does is subordinated to a mindset which seeks to destroy the Israeli state as the representative of evil.

The "Evil," though, is the Jew himself. In September 2001, the legend that following a warning by Mossad 4,000 Jews had not shown up for work at the World Trade Centre on September 11 – a legend invented by Hizbollah and broadcast by *Al-Manar* — spread like wildfire. This "I-hate-you" virus was proliferated a millionfold by internet and satellite across the world. What sort of image of "Jews" does it convey? First of all it assumes that Mossad is prepared to wade in blood in order to harm the Arabs. Secondly, it implies that every Jew outside Israel obeys orders from Tel Aviv. Thirdly, it projects the Hizbollah's own destructive urges onto the victims: the Jews in New York had, allegedly, cold-bloodedly delivered up thousands of their non-Jewish colleagues to death. Goebbels' rule that a lie only has to be big enough to be believed was here faithfully followed. Its global spread and acceptance in itself marks a watershed: overnight the fabricated story of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy was popularized as the central interpretative framework for an event of worldwide significance. If today there are "more antisemites and more antisemitism than ever in the world today" as Alain Finkelkraut asserts, then this is due in some measure to *Al-Manar*.[49]

In Europe, this channel, whose costs are covered by, among other things, advertising German chocolate Milka, the Finnish Smeds, Austrian Red Bull and the French cigarette company *Gauloises*, is broadcast by the Eutelsat satellite firm via its Hotbird 4 satellite.[50] The French newspaper

48. Joseph Croitoru, *Der Märtyrer als Waffe* (Munich: Hanser, 2003), p. 130 and pp. 165ff.

49. Alain Finkelkraut, "Antisemitismus in Wandel. Ein Gespräch mit Alain Finkielkraut" in *Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung* (November 12, 2003).

50. In contrast to their European competitors, US firms such as Pepsi, Coke and Western Union ceased their involvement with *Al-Manar* following protests. See Jorisch, "Al-Manar: Hizbollah TV," *op. cit.*

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Libération estimates that 2.6 million households in France alone can receive the channel, which since 9/11 has also gained growing popularity in Germany's Arab neighborhoods. At least in France the broadcast of the 29-part series *Al-Shatat* unleashed immediate protests. There, Prime Minister Raffarin, having had extracts from the series played to him, is pressing for changes in the media laws in order to block the channel's broadcasts.[51] There is no whiff of any such steps in Germany. As in February 2004 the President of Eutelsat was meeting representatives of the French monitoring agencies to discuss measures to control *Al-Manar*, in Beirut the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung was sitting down with the people behind *Al-Manar*; not however in order to demarcate themselves from it, but to "facilitate change through rapprochement," as the FES wrote in a press release. "We are hoping that they will come to a certain understanding, and that they will form a sort of permanent committee to sustain such dialogue among the Islamists and Europeans" declared a representative of the FES in the runup to the conference.[52]

From Zeesen to Beirut: why did the anti-Semitic holy warriors in 2002 decide to approach Germany in particular with their conference proposal? The answer is no secret. Udo Steinbach, head of the Deutsches Orient-Institut in Hamburg, quite openly waxed enthusiastic about the "lingering effects of the sympathy traditionally evinced for Germany in the whole region."[53] The ideological basis for this sympathy was decisively strengthened by Radio Zeesen and the Mufti's pro-German orientation. Is German foreign policy today picking up the threads of this "sympathy"?

Foreign Office officials evade giving a clear answer to this question. Instead, they often speak with forked tongues: in the Western world every German diplomat would zealously dismiss any doubt about the sincerity of the Federal Republic's rejection of its Nazi past. In the Arab world,

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51. Rausing, "Frequenzen des Hasses. . ." *op. cit.*, p. 50. [While *Al-Manar* has since been banned in France, it is still accessible; it has been banned from US airwaves—*Telos.*]

52. Christian Henderson, "Conference aims to take heads out of the sand," in *Daily Star* (February 18, 2004). Markus Bickel, "Reden und lassen reden," *die tageszeitung* (February 24, 2004). The German government was inolved in the planning and evaluation of this conference. This is clear from a letter sent by Chancellor Schröder's senior foreign policy advisor, Bernd Mützelburg, to the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Paris on April 6, 2004. The aim of the conference, according to Mützelburg, was "to test the capacity of political Islam for dialogue." However, the German government had come to the conclusion that in Beirut they had not yet reached their goal of "contributing to an honest and critical dialogue with members of political Islam." (SWC press release, April 14, 2004).

53. Udo Steinbach, "Der Nahe Osten in der deutschen Aussenpolitik" in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 12/98, p. 27.

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however, no Berlin foreign policy spokesman has ever criticized the virulent pro-Nazi sentiment there. Instead, this sentiment is purposefully ignored and the continuation of a Nazi-like anti-Semitism has met with inexcusable nonchalance. German foreign policy in the Middle East is based on this Janus-faced policy and the results seem to be impressive. As Steinbach affirmed, "the Federal Republic is widely seen in the Middle East as a future great power" and "as an actor which can form a counterweight to an all too dominant American power."[54] In order to achieve this status the approval for "Brother Hitler" is obviously being accepted.

In Beirut, no German neo-Nazis met Hizbollah and its Deputy General Secretary, Sheikh Naeem Qasim, but rather Social Democrats, declared opponents of fascism.[55] However, even to mention Hizbollah's Nazi-like anti-Semitism would have removed the basis for this meeting. So instead the conference tested the waters of "change through rapprochement" around topics where residual German and Arab traditions can be drawn on in equal measure, such as "Neo-Colonialism or 'Benevolent Hegemony,'" "Occupation and Resistance" and "Self-Determination and Independence in a Globalized world."

Some justification was needed after the Beirut conference to bridge the gulf between subjective good intentions and the objective validation of Hizbollah's terror. This justification was "Israel." Participants of the conference tried to make both themselves and critics of the conference believe, that Hizbollah is just reacting to Israel's policies.[56] Certainly, the policy of the Israeli government (like that of any other government) may give rise to anger and criticism. But no Israeli policy, however deserving of criticism it may be, makes plausible the anti-Semites' assumption that Washington is ruled by Jerusalem and that the Pesach meal is prepared

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54. Steinbach, "Der Nahe Osten in der deutschen Aussenpolitik," *op. cit.*

55. Among the participants in the conference were Social Democratic MP Christoph Zöpel (between 1999 and 2002 a minister-of-state in the Foreign Office and currently spokesperson for the SPD's Middle East Dialogue Parliamentary Group), Michael Lüders and Helga Baumgarten (Middle East experts), Volker Perthes, (from the "Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik" think-tank), Andrä Gärber (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung), Manfred Kropp (Deutsches Orient-Institut Beirut) and Friedemann Büttner (FU Berlin).

56. "In the Israeli-occupied territories," declared the most prominent of the German participants, Christoph Zöbel, "force is used on a daily basis," as a result of which Hizbollah also thinks in terms of "changing the situation through the use of force." See "Die Hisbollah ist eine Kraft unter vielen," interview with Christoph Zöbel in *Jungle World*, 25, February 2004. On the relationship between Islamic anti-Semitism and Israeli policy, see Matthias Küntzel, 'The roots of delusion,' on the website www.matthiaskuentzel.de and forthcoming in *Telos*.

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with the blood of murdered children.

Anyone however who believes in presenting Israel as the cause and scapegoat for Islamist violence is not only diverting attention from the goals of Islamism and its Nazi heritage, but is also, by adhering to a new "the Jew is guilty" model, reconnecting with the ancient forms of European anti-Semitism.

The Jew is the evil of the world, declares the Islamist station today, in unison with the earlier one based in Zeesen. It is impossible to get away with fuzzy answers to the question of whether Germany and Europe, in their foreign policies, want to play along with this tradition or to break with it. The absence of clarity is the beginning of complicity, wrote the historian Omer Bartov. Or in the words of Leon Poliakov, "anyone who does not denounce anti-Semitism in its primitive and elementary form, and does not do so precisely because it is primitive and elementary, will have to face the question as to whether he is not thereby sending out a sign of secret approval to anti-Semites all over the world."[57]

57. Leon Poliakov, *Vom Antizionismus zum Antisemitismus* (Freiburg: Ca ira, 1992), p. 104.

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Anti-Americanism and Ambivalence: Remarks on an Ideology in Historical Transformation

Michael Werz

> The European Reader grasps these tangible facts [of politics], and, judging them as though they existed under European conditions, draws from them conclusions disparaging to the country and the people. What he probably fails to do . . . is to realize the existence in the American people of a reserve of force and patriotism more than sufficient to sweep away all the evils that are now tolerated, and to make the politics worthy of its material grandeur and of the private virtues of its inhabitants. America excites an admiration which must be felt upon the spot to be understood.
>
> — James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth,* 1881

America is still admired, respected and emulated. But the keen interest in all things American today takes many different forms, including many that are negative and hateful. In truth, many of the most starkly opposed patterns of interpreting the US have something in common that points to more than the boosterism or rejection of the so-called "American life-style." America, their object of desire or resentment, serves as an almost universal point of reference in regard to how the world perceives political conflict, economic modernization, and the very name itself can express both an engagement with and a reification of the complex cultural and social traditions that comprise modern life.[1]

Anti-Americanism is often treated as if it was a uniform reaction toward some undefined but concrete experience. In reality the phenomenon is only understandable if analyzed against the background of the dual break in October 1989 and the attacks in 2001, two events which together

1. For recent discussion of anti-Americanism, see, among many others, Judy Colp Rubin and Barry Rubin, *Hating America: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Andy Markovits, *Amerika Dich haßt sich's besser* (Berlin: Konkret, 2004), Dan Diner, *Feindbild Amerika* (Munich: Propylaen, 2002).

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mark the end of the short 20th century and the beginning of the present era. Furthermore, anti-Americanism must be developed as a concept which entails and necessitates social and historical particularity in order to be anything but a form of reaction. This is why the following essay mainly focuses on the German case. Here, an astonishing ambivalence toward the US developed in 2001 and 2002, which is as paradoxical as it is a decidedly new occurrence. The contradictory reactions of German society and its most transatlantic post-war government can only be fully understood if the September attacks in New York are connected to its corresponding German time stamp: 9/11 cannot be adequately grasped without 11/9 — with November 9, 1989, when the Berlin wall collapsed and a new era irrevocably began. Contemporary forms of anti-Americanism are not identical with older forms of anti-Americanism: though there are some continuities, they receive their energy from very different sources than the resentment towards the US that was prevalent in the Germany almost one hundred years ago.

Back then, the most intellectually pronounced of such debates were initiated during the first decade of the 20th century, after renowned European social scientists such as Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Joseph Schumpeter, following on the European encounter with America occasioned for many by the St. Louis World's Exposition in 1904, argued that the mode of modernization witnessed in America would soon be coming to Europe. Though these debates tended in many ways to underestimate the power of the tremendous social change then underway, they were absolutely correct in establishing the necessarily transatlantic character of modern social observation.[2]

The US itself had little to do with the resentment and rejection that it has generated on the European continent. Rather, America has repeatedly served as a metaphor of change and as an unacknowledged comparison case, through which Europeans interpret occurrences with no historical precedence. During the era of rapid industrialization, massively growing metropolitan cities, chauvinist nationalism, and politicized cultural differences among the European peoples, the gaze across the ocean was often the constitutive, if unacknowledged historical gesture. The US had recently appeared on the world stage as a serious actor, home of a rival, more advanced system of Western-style modernization. The future had already commenced on the other side of the ocean: Americans had abandoned the folkways, mores, and customs of traditional society, even as,

2. See Georg Kamphausen, *Die Erfindung Amerikas in der Kulturkritik der Generation von 1890* (Weilerswist: Velbruek Wissenschaft, 2002).

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paradoxically, first-generation American sociologists like William Graham Sumner turned to anthropological rather sociological terms to describe this change. The heterogeneous and unprecedented context in which a nation of nations had been established became the focus of distorted perceptions within the emerging mass societies of Western Europe.

The self-declared country of the free and the brave readily served as a projection screen upon which could be cast feelings of European shortcoming and fears of losing traditional benchmarks in a rapidly transforming society. European attempts to "reject" America's path into the twentieth century can only poorly be understood in terms of the concept of divergent paths toward cultural modernity; far more commonly, it was merely a weak form of historical consciousness, a largely European impulse to recapture a vision of clarity, hierarchy, and cultural assuredness that the European past seemed to offer. Thus, anti-Americanism established itself as a negation of the idea of a New World that lacked aristocratic rituals and authoritarian rule; it was the attempt to repatriate modernity into a symbolic America, to map the ills of contemporary society onto an imagined geographic point of origin. Modernity of course has no national origin, it embodies, rather, an internationalized and displaced subjectivity in its historically revolutionary character. The power of the concept of modernity to symbolize this social abstraction meant that modernity in its anti-American form began to thrive during the first two decades of the 20th century, when modernization processes were being acutely felt in Europe. As a particularly modern ideology it was accomplishing sociological miracles, claiming to explain and translate experiences of increasingly abstract and alienated societies into concrete and local terms. Thanks to the appearance of a geographical locus to modernity, a surplus of anger and fear could be projected onto the US, the home of barbaric, uncultured capitalism. Five centuries of shared history were reified into an abstract rejection of the past: the Atlantic ocean came to symbolize the divide between a bad modernity and an idealized present. The philosopher Martin Heidegger reflected the depth of such distorted worldviews when he lamented, "the surrender of the German essence to Americanism has already gone so far as on occasion to produce the disastrous effect that Germany actually feels herself ashamed that her people were once considered to be 'the people of poetry and thought.'"[3] For him and many others the development of modern mass culture on the West

3. Quoted in James W. Ceaser, "A Genealogy of Anti-Americanism," in *Public Interest* 152 (July 2003), p. 14.

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Coast of the US epitomized all that was wrong with modernity.

It is interesting that "Hollywood" is one of the touchstones for the expression of resentment vis à vis the US. But even in the early years of movie mass culture during the 1920s, the audience in the US was diverse enough to force editors, writers, and producers to invent cosmopolitan techniques for reaching out to the largest possible crowd of readers, listeners, and viewers. Hollywood was not at all an agency of worldwide manipulation, but rather the diverse American audience anticipating the global audience. Cultural commodities, which were successful in a country "where custom has had no time to solidify,"[4] were also suited for the world beyond the two oceans. Many contemporary cultural products did not even originate in the US, but were only liberated from their national origin in Hollywood and broadcast back into the world's regions in a generalized version. This holds true for the metamorphosis of European working class dishes into fast food as an expression of eternal time-compulsion; and it holds true for the case for Walt Disney, who found the example for his Anaheim Park in Copenhagen's Tivoli. The same happened with Stravinsky's polyrhythmic music, which was inspired by and in turn found its influence in the new rhythms of jazz, or the achievement of the Bauhaus architects, which could be realized in the US by means of advanced steel construction. In Hollywood this fusion was more intense than in other places; after all, Hollywood was itself a community of international émigrés, with Charlie Chaplin as its first superstar. Because it produced such universally palatable commodities, Hollywood remained the most important cipher for cultural modernization throughout the 20th century.

9/11 and the New Mental World Order

Today, modern mass culture has penetrated almost every society and has created a simultaneity of individual experiences. As a result, the cultural anti-Americanism of the 1920's is quite distinct from contemporary ambivalence toward the US in Europe, and it should not be conflated with current nihilistic rebellions that qualify themselves as Muslim and anti-Western. These differences are important, for ambivalence toward the US is interwoven with justified criticism, and is not identical with the paranoid worldview that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer characterized as the "dark side of knowing and perception." Only a few weeks after the

4. Donald Young, *American Minority Peoples* (New York, 1932), p. 55. Also see Richard Pells, *From Modernism to the Movies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

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devastating attacks of September 11, 2001, one could find on display the astonishing coldness of modern men and women. From Mexico to Europe to Asia, a widespread rationalization set in, mostly led by public and private intellectuals that was sometimes amplified into covert malicious joy. America, the source of violence and all ills, finally had received its comeuppance for its world historical power. Such authoritarian identifications were all too common; however, they represent only part of the story and thus have to be carefully deciphered.

The September 11 attacks and subsequent warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq only amplified and deepened a new ideological constellation that did not develop in a historical vacuum but was a knee-jerk reaction to the political and cultural disintegration of the Eastern hemisphere after 1990. With the end of the Soviet Union even the most unattractive alternative to Western-style modernization had disappeared. Not only did the USSR evaporate as a superpower, but the era of superpowers itself ended. The emerging political vacuum was filled with modern ideologies and distorted perceptions of a new world that had lost the stabilizing point of reference assured by the threat of mutual annihilation. And with no more points of orientation in sight, "America" became the cipher that granted sense (and power) to a senseless, unorderly world. Although it does not make much sense to speak of the "sole remaining superpower," the Cold War vocabulary seems to not allow a more differentiated expression, and the mindless notion of a new imperialism is even less adequate. Lonely superpowers are not as super as they themselves think they are, which is currently being proven in a number of places around the globe. The very concept of an all-encompassing power structure was inextricably tied to the nuclear confrontation of the bipolar age, and with the withering of that epoch the concept has lost its significance.

This does not imply that such notions cannot outlive their reality. After the fall of state socialism, the rhetoric of the American hyperpower multiplied, and all visions of power, authority, and control were projected onto the US. In the imagination of many people the year 1990 provided a *déjà vu* of the 1920's and of 1945, when the historical and social divergence between a traditional and an advanced capitalist society "froze into geographic difference — between Europe and the United States."[5] Such a simple and apparently reassuring set of oppositions made as little sense in 1990 as they did earlier in the century or in the previous one. Again, it is

5. Detlev Claussen, "Die amerikanische Erfahrung der Kritischen Theoretiker," in *Keine Kritische Theorie ohne Amerika* (Frankfurt/Main: Neue Kritik, 2000), p. 29.

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the shared historical and geographical context that configures anti-Americanism: as a true modern ideology it changes constantly, and therefore cannot be analyzed statically. To understand such a complex phenomenon of contemporary consciousness, one must use the historical differences as a source of remembering. The asynchrony of economic and cultural developments within Western societies allows to interpret expressions of ambivalence, resentment, and hatred vis-à-vis "America" as indicators of social and political change. It also proves the continuing entanglement of the one world in which individuals use very common points of reference.

1989-90 as the Return of Uncertainty

The ongoing political impact of the changes that occurred after the historical disruption of 1990 is reflected in the fact that the image of the cold war superpower of the US became the cipher "America." The latter inherited all the attributes of the former, but not nearly as much of its world structuring capacity. Without its necessary counterpart, the Soviet Empire, political orientation was lost, and the cemented convictions of the Cold War — East *versus* West, communist *versus* liberal — coalesced into something even more metaphysical. Since no one could be certain which principles would arrange the new, globalized world, it became a lot more important how people *imagined* it was structured.

The lack of stability and clarity after 1990 led to the simultaneous emergence of a new, distinctly modern piety in many parts of the world. This encompasses not only radical Islam, but Protestant fundamentalism in the US; renewed Orthodoxy and Catholicism in Eastern Europe, which is often combined with ethnic identifications; Hindu radicalism in India; or the Falun Gong in China. In Western Europe the new consciousness was less often expressed in overt religious but in cultural and nationalist forms. Seemingly old national stereotypes were revived, often in negative reference to the US, which as a unique nation of nations and locus of successful diversity served as an ideological antipode.

After 1990, in many political discussions about the future of modern societies people referred to pre-modern forms of community as if all the answers lay in the past. The US, the only society that could not provide for an illusion of a past based on visions of ethnic tradition or on homogeneous self-certainty, became the natural cipher of negative self-definition: it was easy to invent meaning in times of disorientation by defining one's own national aspirations against the experience of modernity; "America" was the cipher, the US the real existing power against which

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such identifications could easily be projected.

Emmanuel Todd's reckless statement that "a single threat to global instability weights on the world today: America, which from a protector has become a predator,"[6] proves that confusion is reigning even in academic debates. So often, the all-important distinction between traditional society and religion is utterly effaced. Modern social organization really does mitigate against traditional structures of authority, while simultaneously pushing human beings toward forms of legitimation that take the shape of imagined communities, invented traditions, or increasingly extreme fundamentalisms. Such modern ideologies only pretend to be remnants of something old, in truth they are more constitutive for social reality than their 19th century predecessors. It is because religious and cultural traditions are lost — not because they have been conserved and prorogued — that they have their appeal. One can understand them as an ideological upgrade, as an ideological intensification of a personal psychology of social adaptation that keeps the balance with reality by intoning the significance of cultural affiliations and heritage, transforming them into insignia of difference in an increasingly uniform society. These modern forms of consciousness have no ties whatsoever to the traditional ensemble to which it refers arbitrarily. Secularization in this sense also means that the individual mind is interwoven with reality. This process, situated at the core of the short 20th century, has been reflected in the paradigmatic shift from the analysis of society to that of memory in the social sciences. Though one cannot live without either, the imbalance produced by making one the substitute for the other, rather than its dialogue partner, is dangerous. Such a stance points to a period of "decaying memory" induced from the enforced "loss of conscious, historical continuity."[7] This process has once again intensified with the dismantling of the Cold War world view and its mooring points which left a vacuum into which religious and ethnic modes of neo-traditionalism have rushed. The spent formulae of past centuries returned as fictions of present past.

Such reinscription of religious dogma into the canons of national belief is nothing new; it was analyzed in the 1940s when the displacement of collective religious faith paved the way for authoritarian consciousness. In a renowned study, Adorno argued that belief was disintegrating

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6. Emmanuel Todd, *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

7. Theodor W. Adorno, "Introduction to Durkheim," in *Soziologie und Philosophie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), p. 48f.

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into mere opinion when he wrote, "formerly the idea of belief was emphatically related to the religious dogma. Today it is applied to practically everything which a subject feels the right to have as his own, as his 'opinion,' without subjecting it to any criteria of objective truth. The secularization of 'believing' is accompanied by arbitrariness of that which one believes: it is molded after the preferences for one or the other commodity and has little relation to the idea of truth."[8]

The German Case

It was an impressive sight when 250,000 Berliners gathered only a couple of days after the September 11 attacks in front of the Brandenburg Gate and all along the city's main avenue, 17th of June, to show their affection and solidarity with the people of the US. They saw almost the entire German administration on the makeshift stage, heard mournful Blues songs and listened to the US ambassador. The most emotional moment occurred when many in the crowd started applauding before his remarks could be consecutively translated. Daniel Coats, the former Senator from Indiana, who had started his German tenure only a few days earlier, was at first puzzled by this behavior. After a short time he realized that the audience, many young people among them, wanted to prove how much of a success story the re-education project had been in Germany, and show their own familiarity with the English language. Soon Chancellor Schroeder's promise of "unconditional solidarity" followed, and only a few weeks later the red-green government went through a narrow vote of confidence in order to send German troops to Afghanistan

Such bold statements were quickly overshadowed and the positions they represented eventually reversed. Johannes Rau, one of the speakers at the Berlin demonstration, was the first to murmur the undertones of American "self-victimization," and he was quick to express his concern about possible American overreactions, almost as if America represented Polyphemus just released from his cave. Rau was swiftly joined by a number of church representatives, as well as such conservatives as former deputy Defense Secretary Willy Wimmer and Norbert Bluem, ex-minister and the icon of Rhineland style social-Catholicism. After the beginning of the war in Afghanistan the murmur turned louder and more pronounced, especially among the Hitler youth generation who crossed old political lines to express their concern about the US. The increasing opposition

8. Theodor W. Adorno *et al.*, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), p. 742.

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against the Afghanistan invasion encompassed a broad number of public figures, such as *Spiegel* editor Rudolf Augstein, ex-Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, and Lothar de Maiziere, a moderate conservative and the last Minister President of East Germany. Erhard Eppler, the old-style social democratic mentor suggested that Europe might offer lessons to the US in how to deal with conflicts in a peaceful way. Liberal historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler, during an Afghanistan-roundtable in Berlin, started talking about Palestine as a bloody wound kept open by Israel, a thesis which he fluidly ran together with his suggestion that 'once again' the Air Force Generals were in charge in world history, a thesis for which he supplied a litany of disasters for which he offered no historical differentiation: Dresden, Vietnam, Serbia, and Afghanistan. Klaus Zwickel, then chief executive of Germany's largest and most influential labor union, demanded the US to "stop the bombardment of Afghanistan immediately," which was at a time when on a rough average fifteen fighter planes were operating over a territory the size of France. Günter Gaus, former member of the late Willy Brandt's government, made remarks about the "unscrupulousness of carpet bombing and the use of cluster bombs." Whereas Green Party Vice-President of the German parliament Antje Vollmer worried that the US was prepared to "convert the war against the Taliban into a worldwide campaign against an unlimited number of private fiefdoms," controversial right wing author Martin Walser said that Europe was obliged to "tell the friend that historical failures and aberrations cannot be corrected through war but solely through peace."[9]

A few months later, when it became clear that a more extensive and more challenging Iraq campaign was inevitable, the rhetoric hardly changed. Ulrich Wickert, a prominent German television anchor, suggested that George Bush and Osama bin Laden share similar "patterns of thinking," while the German fashion designer Joop accused the US of committing atrocities in Afghanistan. In the run-up to the war, legitimate criticism became increasingly difficult to distinguish from resentment against America, as political arguments were often prefaced by simplistic conspiracy theories. This confusion continued and culminated during a tightly-contested German election campaign in 2002, when the sitting Chancellor sought domestic advantage by categorically rejecting German participation in any future American "adventure" in Iraq. This may have emboldened a leading parliamentarian of the Social Democratic Party to

9. All previous quotes in *Stern* 47 (Hamburg 2001), p. 54.

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declare that George Bush behaved "as if he were Preceptor Cesar Augustus." As if this blurring of lines was not enough, the Minister of Justice obliged stupidity by providing the seemingly obligatory Hitler-comparison, a remark for which she was dismissed after the ensuing public protest.

Even if some of these expressions were perhaps driven to extreme by the desire to provide a response to the Bush Administration's frequent rhetorical drubbings of Europe, they are on the whole worse than saying nothing; they lack substantive engagement with the US or its actions. Nevertheless, such emotional expressions neither reveal a German predisposition toward hatred of the US, nor indeed can they be said to represent an overarching national attitude. Though these were extreme ways to voice opposition to any particular policy, they for some reason made sense to those who intoned them.

Modern societies are complex and consist of a multitude of different layers. As has been argued with regard to France, heterogeneous European countries are "made up of countless different groups, every one of which has its 'own' image of America, which frequently changes in the light of circumstances or political events. However, it sometimes happens that this multitude of contradictory perceptions coalesces into a major trend of opinion and for a while the attitudes of the country as a whole become lop-sided, standing excessively positive or negative in the face of American realities."[10] Public opinion is a strange organism; it easily takes on a life of its own when cut loose from the checks and balances of reality, particularly in times of transformation. After the end of the Cold War, when convictions thought to be unshakable were shattered within a few months, individuals felt not only "the right to have. . . his 'opinion' . . . without subjecting it to any criteria of objective truth," as Adorno had it, but people were compelled to develop new opinions about a world order which was itself extremely resistant to being brought under a concept. The only remaining standard to which one could relate, positively or negatively, was that of the one society seemingly untouched by the upheavals of the late 20th century: the US. When people in Germany and other parts of the globe try to define their understanding of the world by distancing themselves from "America," this does not prove alienation and detachment, but its opposite. To define a society as strange and different it has to be "beyond far and near," to use Georg Simmel's words. The fact that

10. Denis Lacorne and Jacques Rupnik, "France Bewitched by America," in Denis Lacorne *et al.*, *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism. A Century of French Perception* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p. 2.

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everybody who has seen a Hollywood movie or visited a Starbucks coffee shop feels entitled to have an opinion about the US, its policies, and its cultural whereabouts only proves the illusion of closeness and transparency. Yet, this is more than just an illusion: it converges with real life experiences, since the US, "is indeed an open society. News and information circulate freely, American media organizations dot the globe, European journalists encounter no special obstacles when they work in the United States, and the number of Europeans traveling to America rises from year to year. However, behind this apparent transparency the real workings of American society are far from obvious. We believe we know a great deal about America, but in fact we know very little."[11]

This unique context provides for the intensity with which people around the world refer to the US, observe and misconstrue its internal workings, and desperately try to develop from it a metric through which the world can be understood. Emphasizing differences is hence a function of closeness among modern societies that share so much with each other. "Strangeness is not due to different and incomprehensible matters," as Simmel observed during the last *fin-de-siècle*, but "it is rather caused by the fact that similarity, harmony, and nearness are accompanied by the feeling that they are not really the unique property of this particular relationship: they are something more general, something which potentially prevails between the partners and an indeterminate number of others, and therefore gives the relation, which alone was realized, no inner and exclusive necessity."[12]

In a global public sphere characterized by this identity and difference, expressions of opinion have to be interpreted. For example, the oft-heard charge that "America lacks history" should not be reflexively labeled a Heideggerian and Germanic attack, or taken as proof that German "cultural pessimism" and anti-Americanism live on as pure continuations of the tradition of their 19th and 20th century counterparts. Rather, the attempt to conjoin America, history, and contemporary problems should be read within the framework of European history throughout the short century, contaminated by violence and genocide. There are of course good reasons why people *imagine* the US as having a disproportionate effect on world history. When the forty-year era of unprecedented stability, peace, and economic growth ended in 1990, the disintegration of the bipolar order resulted in the loss of

11. Denis Lacorne, "Anti-Americanism and Americanophobia: A French Perspective," in Tony Judt and Denis Lacorne, eds., *With Us or Against Us. Studies in Global Anti-Americanism* (London: Palgrave, 2005).

12. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950), pp. 402-408.

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power not only for the Soviet Union but also for the US. Since there is less order in the world, more possibilities of revolutionary change and instability, ideologies become more independent of reality as well.[13] Thus, a broader understanding of the present historical situation must be developed before one has anything approaching a reasonable assessment of the anti-Americanism presently observable not only in Germany, but in many other countries as well.

When one takes a step back, it is clear that two years after the initial outburst of German anti-war sentiment and in light of the increasing complications in Iraq, anecdotal observation and a number of opinion polls agree not only that anti-American feelings are on the rise in Europe, but that European societies are themselves only part of a global trend toward resentful estrangement from the US. However, neither common sense nor polling numbers with their seductive aura of precision provide a complete answer to the question. Anti-Americanism cannot be adequately grasped if the ideological expressions of its actors are taken at face value. The complexity of both modern anti-Americanism and current transformations in Germany society reach beyond empirical processing and statistical tabulations.

Although German ambivalence toward the US certainly participates in the same resentment and distorted representations that feed the more uncompromising and violent forms of anti-Americanism, the two varieties are only partly comparable. Moving from relatively mild antipathy to stronger forms of the "Yankee go home—and take me with you" style to the often absurdly radical and violent postures of distinct segments of the intelligentsia of the Arab world, there are major differences as well as similarities. In the absence of real empires or world order in the classical sense, anti-Americanism fulfills multiple functions for those who (reasonably or not) wish to see themselves in national or subjective opposition to a global force. It is a form of communicative bonding and smallest common denominator uniting of those who otherwise might have little other means to associate with each other: a universal symbol that prepackages the world and makes it readily understandable. There is of course a desperate need for such understanding, after the end of era of confrontation between superpowers and power-blocks, and the leveling power of Americanism in its pro- and contra-forms, helps to simplify reality by ridding it of the non-compatible, refractory dissonance. Since it helps interpret a modern society it is mostly a middle-class phenomenon, a

13. See Gerrit-Jan Berendse, "German anti-Americanism in context," in *Journal of European Studies* 33 (3/4) (2003), p. 334.

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convenient ideology for people with a certain amount of education, ambition, and self-confidence to construe the world in bold terms. For its constituency, the discourse of anti-Americanism condenses overarching and sometimes overwhelming economic and cultural developments into a simplistic worldview. Such false abstractions are quotidian practices in many societies, and "America" is the cipher and the canvas for these projections. Yet, it is important to recognize that these ideas and opinions, although wrong and charged with resentment, do not easily translate into action. Only a very specific set of circumstances is capable of transforming felt ambivalence into a violent rebellion—a rule that applies toward attitudes toward the US as much as any other perceived power.

The current ambivalence toward the US is rooted in contemporary experience. Germany is no exception, and thus the changing public atmosphere should not be obscured by analogies to earlier epochs. Many current interpretations fall victim to the same eternal logic of invariability and de-historicization that they rightly criticize. History does not repeat itself, nor do forms of consciousness. Genuine ambivalence towards the US does not "promote or confirm the pre-existing concepts of America constructed by Heidegger and others," as has been argued.[14] Some have gone so far as to see in this a revival of a long-standing German obsession with American power, which had separate efflorescences at the dawn of the twentieth century, during the interwar period, throughout the 1950s, and in the era of nuclear missile debate and discord during the 1980s. Alas, the notion that "anti-American discourse has not changed much" is equally flawed.[15]

Anti-Americanism in Europe and Beyond

Once one recognizes how "America" can serve as cipher in a given society's integration of itself to the idea of the West, one can begin to see how not all forms of this mystification are the same; each society, even as it forms its relation to America, retains elements of its own traditional — religious or non-religious — identifications. These traces are indeed sociologically legible. Whenever a community undergoes full-scale modernization and undergoes reorganization around the principle of economic competition, the self-perception of every individual undergoes a transformation. Following the breakdown of traditional religious orientations and

14. Ceaser, "A Genealogy of Anti-Americanism," *op. cit.*, p. 16.

15. Ivan Krastev, "The Anti-American Century?" in *Journal of Democracy*, 15/2 (April 2004), p. 6.

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behavioral models, "religion does not play such a decisive role within the frame of mind of most people as it once did; only rarely does it seem to account for their social attitudes and opinions."[16] However, secularization is rarely complete and the bipolarity of the faithful and the non-believer persists in modernized forms. With regard to this transformation, Western and Arab societies underwent similar experiences during the first few decades of the twentieth century, when conventional ideologies and belief systems collapsed under the weight of the new. The circumstances and consequences of modern Turkey's founding in 1923 following WWI and the breakup of the last Islamic empire under the Ottomans can be reasonably compared to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian domain a few years prior. In both cases the empires were destroyed from within when new forms of national and nationalistic identification became more powerful. As was the case in Europe, in many parts of the Arab world, the first two decades of the 20th century were experienced as times of overwhelming modernization and cultural uncertainties. It seemed, as if individuals were thrown back onto themselves. The subsequent emergence of national independence and more radicalized local and regional groups, such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, were the direct result of this ideological individualization. The fact, that traditional religion was cut loose from its dissolved communal ties and privatized in more radical forms is indicative of a crisis, not the strength religion.[17] Very similar to parallel developments in Europe, where the US served as the place holder for modernity, in many decolonizing societies "America" was construed as the icon of "the West", and thus the colonial interference, the source of continued dependence. Religious fundamentalism and unreflective, dehistoricizing nationalism go hand-in-hand; anti-Americanism outside of America and the Nativism of the 1920's within America take on a religious character because they see it as a way to avoid coming to terms with the connection between enlightenment and social modernization.

For the Arab world, historian Dan Diner describes this pattern of negative identification as an odd but logical reversal: "Instead of engaging with the philosophical, social, and civilizatory requirements of enlightenment . . . a substitute for these requirements is found in and sustained by a fundamentalist belief in God — a belief imposed on every aspect of society

16. Adorno *et al.*, *The Authoritarian Personality, op. cit.*, p. 727.

17. See Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001) and *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

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with a elevated religious zeal that cannot be explained through any reference to the narcissistic response of a subaltern culture in the face of a dominant West. Under such a perceptual horizon, the only appropriate attitude toward the West is to seek to over-trump its hegemony, which is imaginable only by adopting an ever-increasing rigidity and radicalism in adopting Islam's religious guidelines."[18] In this sense, anti-American ethno-religious and nationalist ideologies are the constant companion of anti-Americanism. As a habit of thought, they can serve to separate individuals from their own intellectual autonomy and help to legitimize authoritarian rule or nihilistic rebellion. Such fantasies of rebellion against an almost imaginary nation undermine whatever legitimacy they might otherwise have by rendering inchoate and pseudo-concrete what is, as a rebellion against the increasing complexity and uncertainty of modern society, by no means easy to articulate. Recognizing this allows one to see how even the legitimation of secular Baathism in modern Iraq often followed in its stance toward America the same logic pursued by modes of religious fundamentalism.[19]

The experience of alienation is, in other words, easily translatable into the terms of religious or cultural-nationalist self-justification; and once so formulated, it cries out for substantive analysis and historical interpretation. Just as reification can come from any corner of world society, so can the false historical glosses on it. The much bandied-about and largely Western notions of "the clash of civilizations" or of world-historical "cultural conflict" typify the kind of catch-phrase which, in its ignorance and in its categorical misrepresentations, might be transformed into a critical concept, if and only if its emptiness were developed in historical, social, and political terms. Even though these days it may seem as if "culture determines consciousness," in the real world, consciousness must constantly readjust itself to reality, but it cannot create it. The new cultural and ethnic collectivities, spanning from radical Islam to ethnic nationalism on the Balkans to milder forms in German, Italian, or Turkish society, which are shaped contrary to the cipher "America," are based not upon knowledge, but upon amnesia. Forgetting constitutes the core of their epistemology and helped to unleash modern fantasies of political unification and cultural homogeneity that appear on the stage of world history cloaked in ancient garb.

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18. Diner, *Feindbild Amerika, op. cit.*, p. 181.

19. Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), part two, "The Legitimation of Ba'thism."

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Anti-Americanism in Historical Transformation

Conflating very different phenomena by diagnosing an all-encompassing anti-Americanism destroys indispensable distinctions. It is crucial not to underestimate the genesis of modern consciousness, for ideologies also have a history and undergo transformations, not only in the Arab world, but also in Western societies. For example, during the turn of the century's Romantic revivalism, Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of the cultural struggle was widely misunderstood and misused for mythologically-inspired aesthetic and political illusions. This distorted version of Nietzsche's notion of culture was combined with fantastic speculation regarding a future German world power and served to constitute the famous "*Kultur*" versus "Civilization" debate. This distinction, in turn, came to be imposed upon the US, which by 1912-13 had become the world's biggest economic entity, and which therefore appeared as a true imperial rival to a German bourgeoisie that was anti-modern and anti-socialist to the point of self-destruction.

This transatlantic opposition had other historical antecedents as well. Germany was a belated nation, and the hostile feelings towards the US also mirrored the democratic failures of the Wilhelmine state. Anti-Americanism then migrated into the core of German elite self-perception, became an integral part of the nationalistic folklore and its anger against the real-world power shared by many intellectuals. A second important ingredient was the emergence of modern mass cultures in the period before WWI and in the Weimar period, which further enhanced these modes of consciousness. It was an era for which Karl Kraus, looking to Chicago and Detroit, invented the beautiful term "*Fordschritt*" instead of the German "*Fortschritt*" for progress. Cultural and political anti-Americanism merged in the hatred of Woodrow Wilson's internationalism, and against the League of Nations, which anticipated the National-Socialist imperialism of the have-nots. The image of a hypocritical Wilsonsonianism and of the treacherous peace of Versailles became indeed "Siamese twins," as Ernst Fraenkel termed them. And indeed, the prejudice hardened during the following years when the Nazi agitators combined this revanchism with their anti-Semitic rhetoric of German superiority, denouncing "Uncle Sam as Uncle Shylock."

In the postwar period, economic modernization produced *déjà vu* as past experiences appeared under new circumstances. The increasing strength and social mobility of a broad middle class, a reality which had

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already existed in the US a generation earlier, became the universal standard in the Western world. Uneven developments thus led to the perception that the world was being Americanized. From the European perspective, the future was already present in the US, and "America" became the territorial insignia of what was to come. From the post-1945 perspective, there was a further reason for envy: America seemed to be the only industrialized society which had survived two devastating wars without major internal changes.

Although de-Nazification and re-education were relatively successful in Germany, nationalist attitudes did not die out immediately after 1945. However, since the imposition and subsequent myth of the "Zero Hour," this start from scratch idea became an important ideological feature of the new *Bundesrepublik*, and outspoken nationalism was impossible for many years to come. During most of the *Bundesrepublik*'s years one could relate to national traditions in exclusively negative terms. In retrospect it is fascinating and astounding to see that well into the postwar era, when Assistant Secretary McCloy was effectively running Germany, nationalist attitudes of victimization were reinvented by suggesting that Germans had been collectively persecuted by American and allied tribunals and the de-Nazification programs. Still, in February 1953, a *Commentary* Essay on "German Anti-Americanism" documented how long these sentiments would endure before their eclipse. Hence, ambivalence toward the US was a crucial ingredient of German politics during the 1950s and 1960s, and it cut across party lines. Konrad Adenauer, the four-term postwar chancellor, made it quite clear that he did not fully accept the new constitution, the German constitutional law, because it had been foisted upon the Germans by America and France. Furthermore, the standard-issue social criticism in the Adenauer-ear referenced the "superficial culture" of the US, an easy strategy to highlight European and German cultural profundity while avoiding violating the anti-nationalist taboo or the invocation of the distinctly National Socialist polemic against America's "degenerated modernity."[20]

This attitude was secularized only in the late 1960s, when the student rebellion transformed the public and academic sphere. With the elections in 1972, the agonizing Adenauer-era and the following grand coalition finally ended. The student rebellion, with its American protest forms of sit-ins and teach-ins, demonstrations and public debates proved crucial for this first true and substantial democratization of postwar German society.

20. See Dan Diner, *America in the Eyes of the Germans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

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The legitimate criticism of the Vietnam War, shared by many Americans, should not be misinterpreted as the mere persistence of old mentalities as some have persistently suggested. However, the war in South-East Asia, with more than two million Vietnamese victims, led to a shift of political identifications from West to South among left-leaning Germans. The protest against the US combined with widespread enthusiasm and engagement for Third-World causes, and it did much to foster democratic customs in the *Bundesrepublik*. Since liberal students could not affirmatively refer to national traditions, it was often done negatively, against the US. This mechanism helps to explain the revival of anti-imperialist rhetoric during the 1970s.

The fact that Germany's new place in the world developed along lines that appear almost pre-political in nature was due to a unique quality of the *Bundesrepublik*. A good part of its success story had to do with it being a society without a nation, an economic power without national interests, and a global player with almost no foreign policy responsibilities — Germany was indeed at the center of world politics for several decades without seriously participating. This extraordinary situation prolonged the attitude of "determined neutrality" that Hannah Arendt had already observed during her first visit to the country in 1950, when she had the impression that people thought that it was "as absurd to take sides in the [Cold War] conflict as it would be to take sides in an earthquake."[21] In addition, an attitude of provincial realism developed, since violence and war had never played a progressive or liberating role in German history. This is one of the reasons the current challenges produce so much perplexity at a multitude of intellectual and emotional levels. It is not "fear of losing cultural identity" that is expressed in the anti-American cultural stance, but a collective and individual readjustment to massive social and political changes that cannot be grasped in abstract terms encompassed by a phrase like the "search for cultural self-awareness," nor in the academic jargon that writes it off as confusion induced by imbibing too many "second-hand notions of the Frankfurt School's critique of civilization."[22]

It is this constellation of fading neutrality and prevailing provincialism which not only fuels current ambivalence toward the US and results in a simplistic critique of American unilateralism, but which also covers up one's own inability and unwillingness to act. As difficult as it may be to

21. Hannah Arendt, "The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: A Report from Germany," in *Commentary* 10/4 (October, 1950), p. 343.

22. Berendse, "German anti-Americanism in context," *op. cit.*, pp. 335 and 344.

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accept, the neutrality tradition of the old *Bundesrepublik* was an important ingredient in democratizing German society. It was the most radical negation of Nazi partisanship. The politics of the will have been replaced by the politics of unwillingness, one could say. This did not change with the unification of the two German societies in 1990, which was blindly termed re-unification as if something old had been reborn. As a matter of fact, the Eastward enlargement of the *Bundesrepublik* helped to sustain Cold War mentalities for another inward-oriented decade.

Carte Blanche: The New Germany

Such inward orientation was irrevocably challenged by the experience of September 11, 2001, which highlighted the dramatic changes that had transpired silently and were only partly and belatedly addressed with the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo. It meant that a Cold War style of international political abstinence was untimely, and the need to act differently in a world of new threats was palpable. In Germany this implied a tremendous change of political and public conventions; an era of democratic foreign policy had begun for the first time in German history.

Two important challenges of these outmoded attitudes occurred within the expanse of three short years. First, in the fall of 1998 the federal elections completed an overdue generational change by bringing the Americanized cohort of the 1960s to power and ended a prolonged continuation of the *Bundesrepublik.* Second, with the deployment of German troops in the Balkans and the attacks of 9/11 in 2001 it became obvious that Germany's role in future world politics had to be redefined. But that was not an easy task, as old political and social traditions were suddenly gone without having new replacements. When the vacuum had to be filled, it could still not be done with positive references to democratic national tradition in Germany, because close to none exist. In this situation, an astonishing mixture of various but mild forms of anti-Americanism helped to establish new political and foreign policy traditions in the new German nation. It had to be done negatively, the old-fashioned *Bundesrepublik* way.

In Germany, perhaps more than in other societies, September 11 served as yet another reminder that the epoch of foreign policy neutrality had ended and the new country had become a real nation again. But for the time being, a reversal of prior achievements dominated. Before 9/11 the new Germany had indeed become a relatively steadfast and reliable partner for US global policies on the Balkans, in Eastern Europe, and the Near East. This is true despite of fierce Bundesrepublikan criticism and

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despite some of the glimmers of the old Germanic anti-Americanism that appeared in many talk shows, literary supplements, and academic debates. There were classic examples of denial, such as when literary Nobel laureate Günther Grass refused on the NTV live news channel to talk about the hardship in New York, but rather accused the CIA of "terrorist activities," or when political scientist Otto Czempiel at Frankfurt University insinuated that 9/11 meant that "globalization had struck back."

Still, the German middle classes have undergone an Atlantic transition during the 1950s and 60s and experienced a true modernization process. The newly-educated communities have replaced the older German bourgeoisie, and which are separated from previous anti-American ideologies by half a century and two global wars. The difference is partly reflected in the fact that today nobody wants to be seen as truly anti-modern or anti-American. Ambivalence toward the US persists because opinion leaders and other members of the educated new middle classes have not yet found their role in a society in which modernization is still perceived as Americanization, but at the same time have not pursued a more independent path towards inventing new political traditions. Neutrality was not only an important part of the post-fascist legacy, it was central to the establishment of a domestic democratic tradition; and one might well ask whether it does not now appear as an artificial limitation that prevents the society from establishing a democratic foreign policy tradition capable of overturning Germany's considerable deficit in this regard. German foreign policy, that plaything of Bismarck and the Prussian aristocracy was always the most undemocratic feature of Germany's constitutional monarchy, and in many ways the vision of an resurgent empire, itself the quintessence of an anti-democratic definition foreign policy, was crucial to Hitler's political rise. Indeed this knowledge plays a role in the formation of the taboo against having a foreign policy—a taboo that continues to hobble even as it moderates and informs German attempts to engage positively vis-à-vis the country that dominates international policy, the US.

The current blend of military responsibility, new democratic policies, and stubborn resentment that characterizes German society and politics these days is helping to free the new Germany from the practices and rhetoric of neutrality-exceptionalism. This is why anti-Americanism should not be equated with either its predecessors of the 1920s or with the radicalized versions of fundamentalist militancy. Today's anti-Americanism is a different phenomenon, more ambivalent than *anti*. German society has undergone dramatic changes in the second half of the Cold War and

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was part of the Atlantic revolution. Its modernization happened American style when the middle class replaced the reactionary Bourgeoisie. This transformation also codifies the new anti-American resentment of not wanting to be seen as either anti-modern nor as anti-American. The ambivalence proves once more in how many ways the US is the antithetical standard for self-definition in Europe. If this dialectic is appreciated instead of used for shortsighted political gain, the reconstruction of the West could finally begin. If it is perceived as identical with the many other expressions of resentment toward the US all over the world, anti-Americanism will be no more than a catchword, following the logic of a bipolar time long gone.

Criteria for the Reconstruction of the West

A well-formulated critique of modern anti-Americanism can help in laying out the criteria for reconstruction of the West. It can also contribute to differentiating between shopworn and undefined political concepts such as "terror," which increasingly become operational equivalents of modern ideologies and contribute to further de-differentiation of social and political analysis by "extending the range of conventional meaning of terrorism to cover every act of violence, insurrection, rebellion, civil war, armed resistance."[23] Such simplifications are part of the political problem, not part of their solution.

In the 21st century, which is to say after the end of history's unique bipolar era, remainders of past historical experiences of violent secularization, nationalism, and bureaucratic socialism have alloyed to form new amalgams of ignorance and isolation. In addition, modern ethnic and religious ideologies differ from their nationalist ancestors of the nineteenth century, as they are not bound to statehood and its institutions. New ideologies are restricted and boundless at the same time; they usually refer to straightforward communities but hold the potential for global expansion. History, indeed, seems to result from ideas and contemporary ideologies that operate as blinders while appearing to their users as a *passe-partout*. Everything incompatible is omitted from the horizon; those who wear ideological blinders are not appalled by them, but always believe themselves to move forward freely, with purpose and principle. These distortions define the future field of critical analysis.

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23. Sadik Al-Azm, "Islam, Terrorism, and the West Today," in *Praemium Erasmianum Essay* (November 2004), p. 15.

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Number 91 **Winter 2004**

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Jacques Derrida

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Vivian Liska

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Amir Eshel

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Matthew Hofer

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Michael Eskin

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On Anti-Utopianism, More or Less[1]

Russell Jacoby

What fuels the animus against utopia? The images of plenty and ease that constituted classical utopian visions hardly seem to justify contempt or fear. Early literary texts of the Greeks do not promote violence and mayhem. It is difficult to envision these writings inspiring murderous totalitarians.[2] They generally praise peace and damn violence. Hesiod, the eighth-century-B.C. poet usually credited with the first description of utopia, wrote in *Works and Days* of the "golden" men who lived like gods,

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1. This is excerpted from *Thou Shalt Make No Graven Image: Jews, Utopians, and Skeptics from Hannah Arendt to Isaiah Berlin*, by Russell Jacoby, forthcoming from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 2004 Columbia University Press. Used by arrangement with Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

2. To be sure, this is the claim about Plato advanced by Karl Popper (whom I discuss below) in his *Open Society and Its Enemies.* Certainly authoritarianism and even militarism saturate Plato's ideal state as presented in the *Republic*. In any event, I am mainly concerned with the literary utopian tradition, where Plato has played a smaller role than might be expected. As Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel point out in their encyclopedic *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), in the rediscovery of Greek and Roman thought in the Renaissance, most attention was paid to the satiric utopians. "The jocular so far outstrips the grave that allegiance to Aristophanes submerges any admiration for Plato" (p. 99). To the extent that the *Republic* is utopian, it is strictly in service of how to build the harmonious state or city; it is almost a practical guide for Greek cities and colonies. "And so long as your city is governed soberly in the order just laid down," states Socrates, "it will be the greatest of cities. I do not mean in repute, but in reality, even though it have only a thousand defenders." (*The Republic*, in *Plato: The Complete Dialogues*, ed. by E. Hamiliton and H. Cairns [New York: Pantheon/Bollinger, 1963], p. 664). A recent and fair-minded study concludes that "the *Republic* was always rooted in Greek politics. It was always meant to provide a new ideological basis for an aristocratic and oligarchic society. Its most practical political lesson, and the lesson probably of greatest interest to contemporaries, was its defence of hierarchy." (Doyne Dawson, *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], p. 93).

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"carefree in their hearts, shielded from pain and misery."[3] Old age did not exist, and with "limbs of unsagging vigor," this golden race "enjoyed the delights of feasts." "Every good thing was theirs." They "knew no constraint and lived in peace and abundance as lords of their land."

It did not last. Hesiod's is a story of decline. The golden men vanished from the earth and with them, peace and the good life. "The gods of Olympus" formed a second race — "a much worse one" — now of silver. These men, after they reached adolescence, lived only for a short while and succumbed to foolishness. "They could not refrain from reckless violence against one another and did not want to worship the gods." An angry Zeus buried them and made a third race of bronze, which also turned violent. Zeus made a fourth race, and then a fifth race of iron, which includes the age of Hesiod himself. "Neither day nor night will give them rest as they waste away with toil and pain." It is a period of suffering and ingratitude. "There will be no affection between guest and host and no love between friends or brothers as in the past." The lawbreakers "will sack one another's cities." Evildoers will triumph. "Might will make right and shame will vanish."[4]

Could it be plainer? Not utopia, but its collapse is associated with violence. Nor does Hesiod foster an ethereal fantasy often linked with utopias. On the contrary, he encourages practical tasks and duties. *Works and Days* is largely directed at Hesiod's brother, whom he considered slothful and unjust. The poem calls for hard work and a righteous life. "Let there be order and measure in your work / until your barns are filled with season's harvest. / Riches and flocks of sheep go to those who work." It is filled with advice on how to build and when to plow. "Remember! That is the right time for lumbering. / Cut a three-foot log for your mortar and three-cubit pestle." Hesiod's utopianism sounds no more dreamy than do the maxims of Benjamin Franklin.

> Do not postpone for tomorrow or the day after tomorrow;
> barns are not filled by those who postpone
> and waste time in aimlessness. Work prospers with care;
> he who postpones wrestles with ruin.[5]

3. See H. C. Baldry, "Who Invented the Golden Age," *Classical Quarterly* 2 (1952): 83–92, for a statement that Hesiod originated the idea of the "golden age" for Greek thought; see also H.C. Baldry, *Ancient Utopias* (London: Camelot Press/University of Southampton, 1956), p. 9.

4. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, in *Theogony, Works and Days, Shield*, ed. and tr. by A. N. Athanassakis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 70–72.

5. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, p. 77, lines 410–13.

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Most scholars see the poem enjoining a decent and disciplined life. Its "central thesis," writes one classicist, is that "injustice arises from trying to win livelihood and wealth without working for them."[6]

To be sure, even in their Greek incarnation literary utopias did not simply call for citizens to lead a righteous life. Inasmuch as they envisioned another world, the Greek utopias implicitly criticized the state of society.[7] How much and to what end? This is a basic conundrum of the utopian tradition. To what extent are utopian dreams an attack on the here-and-now, the pedestrian, nonutopian reality, and to what extent are they imaginations of a future? Scholars continue to argue whether Aristophanes' play *The Birds* is a hard dig at Athenian society or a light musing about the future?[8]

Two Athenians leave their home ("We can't get away from Athens fast enough") complaining of its litigious population. "We're looking for a less strenuous residence, a City where we can pass our lives in peace." They seek a "carefree place."[9] With two birds as guides they search for Tereus, himself transformed into a hoopoe (an Old World woodland bird) by Zeus. When they find Tereus, they ask where they can find an easy city "where a man can loaf and stretch and lie down in peace." Tereus suggests various Greek cities, which the visitors peremptorily reject, before they turn and ask, "what is life like here among you Birds?" "Not bad," answers the hoopoe. "No money, of course." "There go most of your problems right away," proclaims one Athenian. "As for food," adds the hoopoe, "we have poppy seed and myrtle, white sesame, mint." This information excites the travelers. "It is a non-stop honeymoon!" They come up with a plan: they will join the birds and set up a new society, which they dub "Cloud-cuckoo-land," perhaps the only phrase from Aristophanes adopted into modern English.

Aristophanes paints Cloud-cuckoo-land in broad strokes. As the classicist Victor Ehrenberg writes, the wandering Athenians wish to establish

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6. Joseph Fontenrose, "Work, Justice, and Hesiod's Five Ages," in *Classical Philology* 49, no. 1 (January 1974): 12. See also A. S. Brown, "From the Golden Age to the Isles of the Blest," *Mnemosyne* 51 (1998), pp. 385–410; Juha Sihvola, *Decay, Progress, the Good Life? Hesiod and Protagoras on the Development of Culture* (Helsinki: Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 1989).

7. See M. I. Finley, "Utopianism Ancient and Modern," in K. H. Wolff and B. Moore Jr., eds., *The Critical Spirit: Essays in Honor of Herbert Marcuse* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 3–20.

8. Aristophanes, *The Birds* in *Four Comedies*, ed. and tr. by Dudley Fits (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), pp. 163–243.

9. See the discussion of this phrase in the annotated text, Nan Dunbar, *Aristophanes, Birds* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1995), p. 151.

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a place where "food and love" reign supreme.[10] To this end, they reject numerous new arrivals who want to join but who would strangle the new utopia with the old terrestrial problems: a beggar priest, an oracle-monger, a lawyer, an opportunist poet. "In honor of Cloud-cuckoo-land, that Great City, / I have composed the following lyric items. . . . Long have I meditated on this city," begins the poet. "Impossible," replies a founder. "Why, only a minute ago I was dedicating the place, giving it a name!" They pack off the poet. So too the decree vendor, who arrives to hawk various laws. "I am a dealer in the latest decrees. Satisfaction guaranteed." He is dispatched. As is the lawyer asking for some "wings." Why? He would fly about looking for trade with a "belly full of lawsuits for ballast." While the substance of utopianism in *The Birds* remains vague, it would be difficult to construe it as implicitly or explicitly advocating violence—or even "totalitarian" control. Indeed, one hopeful settler is a mathematician, who arrives with a plan "to subdivide the air into square acres." He is advised to depart and "subdivide somewhere else."

Like many utopias, Cloud-cuckoo-land inhabits ambiguous territory; it spoofs both the society it has left behind and the effort to create something entirely new. The chorus proclaims "Here Love and Wisdom dwell / And through the streets the Graces go / And Peace contrives her spell." But how seriously can this be taken? Is this a light-hearted comedy or a pointed political sally? Does it ridicule an airy utopia or terrestrial imperialism, inasmuch as Athens had just dispatched an expedition to subdue Syracuse, which Aristophanes presumably opposed?[11] "Birds should not be read as an escapist fantasy," writes A. M. Bowie. The play seeks to deflate Athenian arrogance and militarism.[12] Undoubtedly, a polemical or political ethos colors *The Birds*, a sentiment it shares with other plays by Aristophanes such as the antiwar play *Lysistrata*. Yet Aristophanes leavens its earnestness with comedy and jokes, a recurring tactic in utopian literature. The parody bespeaks seriousness.[13]

Lighthearted utopianism remains alive and well several centuries later in Lucian, the Greek satirist, whose writings are sometimes considered to

10. Victor Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes: A Sociology of Old Attic Comedy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951), p. 57.

11. See Douglas M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes and Athens: An Introduction to the Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 199–228.

12. A. M. Bowie, *Aristophanes: Myth, Ritual, and Comedy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 177.

13. See Friedrich Solmsen, *Intellectual Experiments of the Greek Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 76–78.

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have inaugurated the genre of utopian science fiction. Lucian put his cards on the table in *The True History*: "I have no intention of telling the truth. . . . I am writing about things entirely outside my experience. . . . Do not believe a word I say." Lucian travels to the moon and back and even stumbles across Aristophanes' Cloud-cuckoo-land. "'So Aristophanes was telling he truth after all,' I said to myself."

On earth, he and his fellow travelers come to the Island of the Blessed, infused with a "wonderful perfume." Birds sing and a pleasant breeze wafts through the trees. Nobody grows old. "Instead of four seasons they have only one . . . spring." A delightful party permanently takes place. "Guests recline at their ease on beds of flowers, and are waited on by the winds." Sexual relations are free and easy. "They see nothing indecent in sexual intercourse, whether heterosexual or homosexual." (Lucian adds: "The only exception was Socrates, who was always swearing his relations with young men were purely Platonic.") Good spirits are much facilitated by the waters of laughter and pleasure. "The first thing a guest does when he gets there is take a sip from each of these springs, and from then on he never stops laughing and having a wonderful time."[14]

Jesting utopianism with a serious message still flourished a millennium and half later in More and Rabelais, both aficionados of Lucian. Along with Erasmus, More translated several of Lucian's dialogues. As More's biographer comments, "Lucian would seem an unlikely interest for two Christians, since he was bawdy, sometimes obscene, always skeptical of supernatural religion."[15] Yet his irony, his boldness, and perhaps his utopianism appealed to Erasmus and More. Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, first published in 1511, was dedicated to More and punned on the Greek noun *moria* ("folly") associated with his name; it also defended the Lucian-like approach to humor Erasmus and More shared.[16] Erasmus wrote (to More) in his letter-introduction to Praise of Folly that "trifling may lead to something more serious."

"Jokes can be handled in such a way that any reader who is not altogether lacking in discernment can scent something far more rewarding in

14. Lucian, *The True History*, in *Satirical Sketches*, ed. P. Turner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 249–94. For a discussion of Aristophanes and Lucian and a full scale commentary on "The True History," see Aristoula Georgiadou and David H. J. Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel. True Histories: Interpretation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

15. Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1984), p. 83.

16. See David Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins: Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 167–76.

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them than in the crabbed and specious arguments of some people we know — when, for example, one of them endlessly sings the praises of rhetoric or philosophy in a botched-up oration, another eulogizes a prince. . . . Nothing is more entertaining than treating trivialities in such a way as to make it clear you are doing anything but trifle with them."[17]

This spirit informs More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, from the title, itself a joke (*utopia* = no place) to the characters. The main figure reporting about utopia is called — in a more literal English translation — Raphael "Nonsenso."[18] The original text included a page with the "utopian alphabet" and a specimen of (bad) utopian poetry written by the Poet Laureate, "Mr. Windbag." In his letter-introduction, More winks that he has heard of a "very pious theologian" who desperately wants the pope to send him to Utopia as its bishop. Before departing from his utopian island Raphael gives the inhabitants Greek works including Aristophanes and Lucian, "whom they find delightfully entertaining."[19] One recent study concludes that Lucian's *True History* was the "inspiration" for More's Utopia.[20] T.S. Dorsch, the classicist and translator, wrote, "I should place Utopia next to my copy of the works of Lucian."[21] Rhetorical lightness does not undermine More's seriousness — or Aristophanes'.

All this is equally true of another utopian sketch that appeared only fifteen years after More's *Utopia* by another admirer of Lucian, and the name of its author name has become synonymous with satire and comedy: François Rabelais. Like More, Rabelais had translated Lucian; unlike More, in the words of his biographer, he "aspired to become the French Lucian."[22] To emphasize a link to More, in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* Rabelais named Gargantua's kingdom "*Utopia*."[23] In a series of famous

17. Erasmus, "Prefatory Letter: Erasmus of Rotterdam to his friend Thomas More," in *Praise of Folly*, ed. by A. H. T. Levi (Penguin Books: New York, 1993), pp. 6–7.

18. See Paul Turner, introduction to his translation of *Utopia*, by Thomas More (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 8.

19. More, *Utopia*, Turner ed., *op. cit.*, p. 100.

20. Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, *op. cit.*, p. 193. See Christopher Robinson, *Lucian and His Influence in Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1979), pp. 130–33.

21. T. S. Dorsch, "Sir Thomas More and Lucian: An Interpretation of *Utopia*," in *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 203 (1966–1967), p. 350.

22. M. A. Screech, *Rabelais* (London: Duckworth, 1979), p. 8. For the role of Lucian in Rabelais, see generally, Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, *op. cit.*

23. For a consideration of Rabelais's links to More, see V. L. Saulnier, "L'Utopie en France: Morus et Rabelais," in J. Lameere, ed., *Les Utopies à la renaissance* (Brussels: Presse Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1963), pp. 135–62. Cf. Michaël Baraz, *Rabelais et la joie de la liberté* (Paris: José Cort, 1983), pp. 241–82.

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chapters ending book 1, Gargantua builds the Abbey of Thélème to reward Friar John for his help in battle. The friar declines to direct an existing religious community; instead, he requests Gargantua to found a new "religious order in exactly contrary ways to all others."

The request pleases Gargantua who proceeds with gusto. "Because ordinarily monks and nuns make three vows, that is of chastity, poverty, and obedience, it was decreed that there anyone could be regularly married, could become rich, and could live at liberty." He also dispensed with a tiresome schedule. Gargantua believes that "the greatest waste of time he knew was the counting of hours — what good does it do? — and the greatest nonsense in the world was to regulate one's life by the sound of a bell." Inasmuch as in religious communities "everything is encompassed, limited, and regulated by hours," in the Abbey of Thélème, "it was decreed that there be no clock or dial at all." This was a religious institution with a difference. For the residents: "All their life was regulated not by laws, statues, or rules, but according to their free will and pleasure. They rose from bed when they pleased, and drank, ate, worked and slept when the fancy seized them. Nobody woke them; nobody compelled them either to eat or drink or do anything else whatever. So it was that Gargantua had established it. In their rules there was only one clause: DO WHAT YOU WILL."[24]

Yet the lightness and good cheer that generally enveloped utopianism dissipated. This can be stated more exactly and almost paradoxically. The announcement of "utopia" by Thomas More corresponds to its denouncement by Thomas More. Utopianism and modern anti-utopianism converge in More. The vast secondary literature on More covers all aspects of his life, yet most of it focuses on *Utopia* and, to a lesser extent, on his execution in 1535 after his refusal to countenance the succession of Anne Boleyn as queen of England. More entered royal service in 1518 and advanced to "theological councillor" and, in 1529, to Henry VIII's lord chancellor. However, he declined to accept Henry's machinations to shift the Church's supreme authority in England from the pope to himself as king. Through this maneuver Henry sought to legalize his divorce and remarriage — a series of acts that precipitated the English reformation.

For his unbending resistance to the king and his wide learning, history has been kind to More; he has generally been viewed as a great and principled humanist. The Catholic Church sainted him. The 1960 Broadway play (later turned into a movie) *A Man for All Seasons* painted More in the

24. François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, tr. and introduced by J. M. Cohen (New York: Penguin Books, 1955), pp. 150–59, book 1, 52–58.

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warmest of colors. "I do none harm," he states in the play. "I say none harm, I think none harm, and if this be not enough to keep a man alive, in good faith I long not to live."[25]

Yet More did do harm. In the service of the Crown he hunted and pursued Protestants and heretics. Historians and biographers have long known and argued over this, but it has barely intruded upon public consciousness — and has remained neglected when it did. A seven-hundred-page collection of "essential articles" on More barely mentions him as the scourge of heretics and Protestants.[26] Of course, for those interested in utopianism, More is simply the author of *Utopia*. J. H. Hexter's classic study concerns itself with reconstructing More's environment and mind as he was writing *Utopia* in the summer of 1515 and the fall of 1516 — with one brief consideration of 1518, when More entered royal service.[27]

However, for those considering the larger events of the day — and the vagaries of utopia — More's reputation as a noble and sensitive humanist seems questionable. He pursued until death William Tyndale, the Protestant theologian whose English translation of the Old and New Testaments formed the basis of the King James Bible. The literary critic George Steiner has judged that Tyndale not only endowed the English Bible with a rare eloquence but that he "molded the governing forms of English style." Of the 287 words in the Sermon on the Mount in the Kings James Version, 242 are from Tyndale: "No man can serve two masters. For either he shall hate the one and love the other."[28] This is Tyndale, the man More persecuted tirelessly.

Brian Moynahan's recent account of More and Tyndale, subtitled "A Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal" closes bitterly. Like Steiner, he reminds us that the King James Bible is largely based on Tyndale's work, but Tyndale is forgotten. On the other hand, "Posterity has treated him [More] well. His general revelry in the stake and fire [for heretics], and his individual and obsessive hatred of William Tyndale, are largely forgotten. He progressed smoothly from beatification. . . to canonization. . . . He is plentiful honored in the names of schools, colleges, housing estates, and

25. Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons* (1960) (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 160.

26. R. S. Sylvester and G. P. Marc'hadour, eds., *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1977).

27. J. H. Hexter, *More's Utopia: The Biography of an Idea* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 3.

28. George Steiner, "The Book," in *Language and Silence* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), pp. 189–90.

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streets, by statues and monuments. . . . Paul II did him the ultimate honor on 31 October 2000 proclaiming him to be the patron saint of politicians." Moynahan adds that this papal act is "at the very least, bizarre. Politicians persecute opponents readily enough without having More dangled in front of them as a role model."[29]

J. H. Hexter's study opens by musing on More's "mysterious" intention in writing *Utopia*, but the mystery thickens when one views the whole of More's career. After *Utopia* a new side of More surfaces: unyielding, ill humored, intolerant. The utopian More gave rise to the anti-utopian More. In *Utopia* the king laid down the rule that "every man might cultivate the religion of his choice, and might proselytize for it, provided he did so quietly, modestly, and rationally and without bitterness towards others." The king believed it was "errant folly for anyone to enforce conformity with his own beliefs by means of threats or violence," which would only lead to "fighting and rioting." "So he left the whole matter open, allowing each individual to choose what he would believe."[30]

After More entered into service to the crown, however, he did not "leave matters open" but fought with a heavy hand what he considered sedition and heresy. In the epitaph he wrote for himself, he proudly owned that he was a "molester of thieves, murderers, and heretics."[31] This formulation troubled even his admirers. When his monument was restored in the nineteenth century, "heretics" vanished from the epitaph. More now fought only "thieves and murderers."[32] Controversy continues as to whether More, while lord chancellor, personally oversaw the execution of six Protestants. An older account states emphatically, "the facts in this controversy seem clear: More did establish full toleration of all religions in Utopia . . . and he did, later, not only approve but also bring about the execution of heretics."[33]

What is beyond dispute is that More fought with increasing vigor and malice what he considered Lutheranism and sedition, censoring books

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29. Brian Moynahan, *If God Spare My Life: William Tyndale, the English Bible, and Sir Thomas More — a Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal* (London: Little, Brown, 2002), pp. 387, 173.

30. Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. and tr. by R. M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 74.

31. Thomas More, "More's Epitaph," in *Utopia and Other Essential Writings*, ed. by J. J. Greene and J. P. Dolan (New York: New American Library, 1984), p. 285.

32. John Guy, *Thomas More* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 106.

33. Russell Ames, *Citizen Thomas More and his Utopia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 21.

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and imprisoning their purveyors. As John Guy summarizes in his recent biography: in his first year as lord chancellor, More secured decrees and proclamations to proscribe over a hundred books. He arranged the arrest of those dealing in this literature, and when they were brought before More in Star Chambers, he applied the full severity of the law in the punishments which he handed down. The booksellers were fined and imprisoned. Their stocks of heretical literature were publicly burned. Lastly, they themselves were forced to perform public penance: being paraded on market days through the streets of London on horseback, sitting back-to-front, their coats 'pinned thick' with the proscribed books, while they were pelted with rotten fruits.[34]

More wrote a series of tracts attacking Luther and supporting the "burning of heretics" as something "lawful, necessary, and well done."[35] He relentlessly cursed, maligned, and insulted Luther and his supporters. While violent and earthy language marked all English polemics of his day, More's deserves special mention. A prose sample of England's leading humanist: "[Luther] has nothing in his mouth but privies, filth and dung, with which he plays the buffoon. . . . If he will swallow down his filth and lick up the dung with which he has so foully defiled his tongue and his pen . . . to carry nothing in his mouth but bilge-water, sewers, privies, filth and dung . . . We will take timely counsel, whether we wish . . . to leave this mad friarlet and privy-minded rascal with his ragings and ravings, with his filth and dung, shitting and beshitted."[36]

In one of these tracts he came close to disavowing *Utopia*. He replied to a charge that seeds of Lutheranism might be found in the book of his good friend Erasmus' *Moria*. More denied it, but went on to say that "in these days" men "by their own default misconstrue and take harm of the very Scripture of God." If someone "would now translate *Moria* into English, or some works either that I have myself written ere this," probably referring to *Utopia*, More would take these books and "burn them both with my own hands."[37]

What turned the author of *Utopia* into a censor and persecutor? John Guy's measured conclusion is that the "the schizophrenia created by

34. Guy, *Thomas More*, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

35. More, *The Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, in *Utopia and Other Essential Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

36. More, *Responsio ad Lutherum*, cited in David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 258–59.

37. More, "Confutation of Tyndale's Answer," in *Utopia and Other Essential Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

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More's dual role as author of *Utopia* and inquisitor in heresy cases will never be dispelled."[38] Richard Marius, an editor of the complete works of More, offers a harsher assessment still. More, he writes in his biography, pursued heretics without "any flash of mercy or tolerance."

> More believed that they should be exterminated, and while he was in office, he did everything in his power to bring that extermination to pass. That he did not succeed in becoming England's Torquemada [the Spanish Inquisitor] was a consequence of the king's quarrel with the pope and not a result of any quality of mercy that stirred through More's own heart.[39]

The biographer Jasper Ridley concludes the darkest judgement of all in *The Statesman and the Fanatic*. He calls More a totalitarian and mass murderer, the equal of any twentieth-century Stalinist or Nazi. He was a brilliant intellectual "whose principles and flawless logic" and repressed hatred "would have turned him into a fanatic determined to crush what he considers to be the forces of evil." One can imagine More, Ridley concludes, "after writing books about socialism and planning [his *Utopia*], becoming more and more obsessed with the menace of the enemy who was assaulting civilization, and reaching the point where he justified by specious arguments, the liquidation of millions of human beings as regrettable but necessary." For Ridley, people like Thomas More threaten the world.[40]

Ridley's conclusion cannot be sustained; he uses twentieth-century categories to damn More. Nevertheless, Ridley's argument deserves attention inasmuch as it exemplifies the anti-utopian ideology as it has taken shape in the last half century. He highlights the light-hearted utopian turning into the heavy-handed anti-utopian. Indeed, with More, or through More, we can see the emergence of modern anti-utopianism. Ridley links too neatly utopianism and totalitarianism, but something does happen to More that is worth considering. More's anti-utopian sentiment does not simply emerge out of the mystery or paradoxes of his character.

The world changed after More wrote *Utopia*. Lutheranism, Anabaptism, and the peasant wars swept through Europe. The utopianism that once seemed to More innocuous now struck him as dangerous speculation. "The past centuries have not seen anything more monstrous than the Anabaptists," wrote More in 1528.[41] As C. S. Lewis put it, "the times

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38. Guy, *Thomas More*, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
39. Marius, *Thomas More*, *op. cit.*, p. 406.
40. Jasper Ridley, *The Statesman and the Fanatic: Thomas Wolsey and Thomas More* (London: Constable, 1982), p. 293.
41. Cited in Ridley, *The Statesman and the Fanatic*, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

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altered; and things that would once have seemed to him permissible or even salutary audacities came to seem to him dangerous." In *Utopia* More half seriously, half playfully defended a kind of communism. After the Reformation upsurges, he attacked the communism of the Anabaptists as a horrible heresy — and defended private riches.[42]

As More responded to these religious and political threats of the 16th century Reformation, he turned against his own past; perhaps for the first time, a virulent anti-utopianism surfaced in history. In two ways More anticipated the future. His own anti-utopianism, fed by a sense of betrayed utopian hopes, would prove typical, perhaps exemplified in the 1950 collection *The God That Failed* by disillusioned former communists such as Arthur Koestler and Ignazio Silone. In addition, twentieth century accounts of totalitarianism would ratify More's vendetta. The classic work here is Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, published in 1957 and subtitled "Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and Its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements."

Cohn linked medieval and Reformation millenarianism with both Nazism and communism. This messianism sought to establish through a miraculous event or "final" struggle a world "inhabited by a humanity at once perfectly good and perfectly happy." For Cohn millennium movements not only issued into violence but prefigured modern totalitarianism. "The more carefully one compares the outbreaks of militant social chiliasm during the later Middle Ages with modern totalitarian movements the more remarkable the similarities appear." Both share a "form of politics" that Cohn dubs "subterranean revolutionary eschatology." Both operate with "phantasies" of a final struggle in which "the world will be renewed and history brought to its consummation."[43]

Cohn's book closes with a discussion of Thomas Müntzer and the militant Anabaptism that disturbed Thomas More. For Marxists from Friederic Engels to Karl Kautsky and Ernst Bloch, Müntzer has long been a hero, a mystical revolutionary championing the common people.[44] Conversely, for critics of Marx, Müntzer prefigures everything deplorable about utopianism. "If one compares these two old Testament types" of

42. C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pp. 169–70. Lewis's few pages on More are outstanding.

43. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and Its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements* (1957; 2nd edition, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), pp. xiv, 308–9.

44. See Thomas Nipperdey, *Reformation, Revolution, Utopia: Studien zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), pp. 38–84.

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Müntzer and Marx, writes Abraham Friesen in *Reformation and Utopia*, "one finds the greatest similarities in their thought. The point of departure for both is an eschatological one: the hoped-for Kingdom of God on earth, that is the communist classless society."[45] While nothing directly links Müntzer and More, Müntzer emerged from a world defined by Luther on one side and Erasmus on the other.[46] More was battling what he saw as his own illegitimate offspring — utopianism gone amuck.

Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957) belongs to a series of writings that appeared in the wake of World War II and defined contemporary anti-utopianism. In a dozen years a liberal anti-utopian consensus took shape that has not only endured but has gained strength with each passing decade. Its major writings include Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), J. L. Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1951), Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), and several essays of Isaiah Berlin from the 1950s. Together, these texts make a compelling and inclusive case about the dangers of utopian thought. Popper begins with Plato; Cohn with the Middle Ages; Talmon with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment; Arendt with the French Revolution. Not only do their approaches parallel and complement each other, but their biographies share a great deal. For starters they roughly belonged to the generation born before or during World War I: Popper (1902–1994); Arendt (1906–1975); Berlin (1909–1997); Cohn (1915–); Talmon (1916–1980). Second, they were all Jewish or of Jewish descent. Third, except for Cohn, they fled or left their countries of origin. Fourth, except for Cohn, they came from the left.

To be sure, these features do not automatically produce anti-utopianism. Yet they determined anti-utopian thought in several ways. The facts of the authors' lives bestowed upon anti-utopianism an indisputable gravitas. The criticism of utopia seemed as considerable as its eminent exponents. People such as Hannah Arendt and Isaiah Berlin appeared to the Anglo-American universe as emissaries from another world; they were veterans, and sometimes refugees, of wars, upheavals, and lethal

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45. Abraham Friesen, *Reformation and Utopia: The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation and its Antecedents* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), p. 14.

46. On Müntzer and Luther, see generally Abraham Friesen, *Thomas Muentzer, A Destroyer of the Godless: The Making of a Sixteenth-Century Religious Revolutionary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). On Müntzer and his links to Christian humanism, including Erasmus, see Ulrich Bubenheimer, *Thomas Müntzer: Herkunft und Bildung* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), pp. 194–229.

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governments.[47] They tapped experiences unavailable to Americans. They spoke English with old world accents. To denizens of Berkeley Hannah Arendt incarnated the central European revolutionary. "Rosa Luxembourg has come again," remarked one student, after hearing Arendt lecture.[48]

The experiences of war and flight saturate their writings. They spoke for a generation that had witnessed everything. "We no longer hope for an eventual restoration of the old world order with all its traditions," wrote Arendt in the opening to *Origins of Totalitarianism*. "Two world wars in one generation, separated by an uninterrupted chain of local wars and revolutions, followed by no peace treaty for the vanquished and no respite for the victor" means that the "essential structure of all civilizations is at the breaking point."[49] Their analyses borrowed an aura of profundity from their lives. These sages knew of what they wrote, what Arendt called "the truly radical nature of Evil."

Their biographical similarities also colored anti-utopianism in specific ways. By dint of their age and political inclinations they had been attracted to communism before confronting fascism. The Russian Revolution, the European revolutionary upheavals after WWI, and Marxism in the 1920s stamped their work. Disenchantment with communism marked their lives but preceded the full threat of fascism of the 1930s. This meant they sought understanding of what happened to Marxism before turning to fascism; the latter was viewed through the lens of the former. Eventually they saw Marxism and fascism as related phenomena, different versions of totalitarianism. Inasmuch as a utopianism informed Marxism (despite the anti-utopian pronouncements of Marx and Engels), the theory of totalitarianism, which they developed, underlined the poisonousness of utopianism. Presented by refugee scholars of great repute and allure, it carried the day. Their liberal criticism became the conventional wisdom of our time; it damned utopianism as the scourge of history.

This trajectory is exemplified by Karl Popper, who was the first and probably the most important figure of this group to elaborate a forceful anti-utopianism. In *The Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society and*

47. They also appear when the American government and scholarly community registered a sharp hike in a demand for experts on Germany and Europe. See Alfons Söllner, *Deutsche Politikwissenschaftler in der Emigration: Studien zu ihrer Akkulturation und Wirkungsgeschichte* (Opladen: Westdeutsche Verlag, 1996), p. 250.

48. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 294.

49. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian/World Publishing, 1958), p. vii.

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Its Enemies, which date from 1944 and 1945, Popper presented a full-scale criticism of utopian thought that has continued to resonate. He dedicated *The Poverty of Historicism* to the "memory of the countless men and women of all creeds or nations or races who fell victims to the fascist and communist belief in Inexorable Laws of Historical Destiny." While "belief in Inexorable Laws of Historical Destiny" might seem distant from utopianism, for Popper they were synonymous.

Popper, who was born in Vienna in 1902, believed Jews were treated reasonably well in prewar Austria, but anti-Semitism did cause his parents to convert to Lutheranism — "to become assimilated."[50] He belonged to a network of family and friends dense with gifted artists, musicians, and scientists. He was related, for example, both to Bruno Walter, the conductor, and Josef Breuer, the doctor who collaborated with Freud.[51] Intellectually inclined, he gravitated, like many of his acquaintances, toward politics and psychology. He was twelve when World War I began; he was sixteen when it ended in upheaval and revolution. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy, a vast, unwieldy collection of territories and peoples, became, among other things, the Austrian Republic. "The war years, and their aftermath," he recalled, "were in every respect decisive for my intellectual development."[52] In a "historical note" to *The Poverty of Historicism*, Popper wrote that its thesis "goes back to the winter of 1919–20."

For a moment a red revolution flickered and attracted the young Popper, who joined the ranks of the far left. In the spring of 1919 Popper participated in a demonstration organized by communists to free comrades held in the central police station. Shooting broke out, and several young workers were killed. "I was horrified and shocked by the brutality of the police," Popper recalled, "but also by myself. For I felt that as a Marxist I bore part of the responsibility for the tragedy — at least in principle." He questioned whether the "scientific" Marxist creed promising "to bring about a better world" was based on real knowledge about society. "The whole experience . . . produced in me a life-long revulsion of feeling."[53]

Popper remained emphatically leftist, however,[54] and so much in the

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50. Karl Popper, *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1976), p. 105.

51. See generally Malachi Haim Hacohen, *Karl Popper—the Formative Years, 1902–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

52. Popper, *Unended Quest*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

54. See Karl Popper, "Die 'politische' Biographie," in Herbert Marcuse and Karl Popper, *Revolution oder Reform?* ed. by F. Stark (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1971), p. 9.

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romantic thrall of the proletariat that for several years he tried turning himself into a manual worker — first a road builder and then a cabinetmaker. He eventually drifted into social work, teaching, and philosophy. His ideas on the deficiencies of Marxism continued to develop, but he kept them under wraps for political reasons: he did not want to weaken the Marxists, who formed the backbone of the opposition to fascist authoritarianism. However, the situation in central Europe deteriorated. Even before 1933, when the Nazis came to power in Germany, Popper sensed that the days of Austrian democracy were numbered, and with it the days of Jews. By the mid-1930s Popper actively sought to leave Austria. In 1937 he sailed for New Zealand to accept an offer of lectureship at Canterbury University College — none too soon. In 1938 Hitler marched through the cheering streets of Vienna. With the demise of Austria, Popper believed he no longer needed to "hold back" his criticism of the socialists. He set out to elaborate his ideas in *The Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society and Its Enemies*.

The Poverty of Historicism puns on Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*, itself a spoof of Proudhon's *The Philosophy of Poverty*. While Popper's language is frequently idiosyncratic, if not misleading — this was only the second work he wrote in English — his anti-utopian convictions stand out. Popper identifies as overlapping failings historicism, historical prophecy, and utopianism. He frequently uses formulations like "Utopianism and historicism agree." For Popper, historicism posits laws and rhythms of history; it seeks to know the future and, sometimes, to intervene to control or quicken "impending social developments." Marxism "excellently represents the historicist position," a position that spells out the rise and fall of capitalism and calls for the proletariat to speed its demise.[55]

To drive his point home on the dangers of utopianism, Popper draws parallels between nonhistoricist (and nonutopian) and "historicist" (and utopian) ideas and two different approaches to social reform. The nonhistoricist perspective employs what Popper calls "piecemeal engineering." Factual limitations impress the piecemeal engineer, who like any good scientist focuses on parts, not the whole. He or she believes in "small adjustments and re-adjustments" and proceeds "step by step, carefully comparing the results expected with the results achieved." The piecemeal reformer "tinkers" but does not pursue a "method of re-designing it [society] as a whole." On the other hand, the historicist, "holistic," or "utopian

55. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 84, 45, 51.

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engineer" aims at "remodeling the 'whole of society' in accordance with a definite plan or blueprint." Yet the whole, Popper believes, "cannot be made the object of scientific study" or "control or reconstruction." This eludes the utopians who plan to "reconstruct our society 'as a whole'" and thereby succumb to the "totalitarian intuition."[56]

Popper expanded these ideas in the two volumes of *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, which is devoted to understanding totalitarianism and the fight against it. He remarked that his book was conceived in March 1938, "the day I received the news of the invasion of Austria" by the Nazis. Yet the book is mainly devoted not to Nazism but to Marxism and utopianism. Popper observes an elective affinity between democracy and piecemeal engineering, on one side, and totalitarianism and utopian engineering, on the other. The former examines specific institutions and their functions and asks questions about appropriate means for given ends, such as "is this institution well designed and organized to serve" these goals? He provides an example: insurance.

The social engineer does not care whether the insurance industry originated to serve private profit or the public good. However, he may "offer a criticism of certain institutions of insurances, showing, perhaps, how to increase their profits, or . . . to increase the benefits they render to the public." In other words, the social engineer examines means, not ends, and judges whether something is tailored to its goals. The utopian, on the other hand, considers origins, ends, and "true roles" of insurance. He or she will evaluate whether "its mission is to serve the common weal." The utopian takes the standpoint of history and assesses the intention of the founders and its contemporary significance.[57]

The piecemeal engineer is as committed to social betterment as the utopian, but he uses tools that are more practical and less violent. For the engineer, perfection is not attainable. While every generation has a right to happiness, instead of seeking "the greatest ultimate good" the down-to-earth engineer resists the great evils afflicting mankind. For Popper, "this difference is far from being merely verbal. . . . It is the difference between a reasonable method of improving the lot of man, and a method which . . . may easily lead to an intolerable increase in human suffering." Moreover, the existence of specific injustices can be agreed upon, unlike "the establishment of some ideal." "It is infinitely more difficult to reason about an ideal society. Social life is so complicated that few men, or none at all,

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67, 78–79.
57. Popper, *Open Society, op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. viii, 22–23.

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could judge a blueprint for social engineering on the grand scale; whether it be practicable. . . . As opposed to this, blueprints for piecemeal engineering are comparatively simple. They are blueprints for single institutions, for health and unemployed insurance, for instance, or arbitration courts, or anti-depression budgeting or educational reform. If they go wrong, the damage is not very great, and a re-adjustment not very difficult. . . . It is easier to reach a reasonable agreement about existing evils . . . than . . . about an ideal good."

The utopian blueprinters aim to realize a far-reaching ideal, and this leads to a dictatorship. They want to transform society, "leaving no stone unturned." It is the "sweep" of utopianism — its "desire to build a world which is not only a little better and more rational than ours, but which is free from all its ugliness: not a crazy quilt, an old garment badly patched, but an entirely new gown, a really beautiful new world" — that makes it so dangerous.[58]

Popper formulated these ideas sharply in a 1947 lecture, "Utopia and Violence." In title and sentiment the talk anticipated Arendt's "Ideology and Terror" in her (revised) *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Popper called himself a rationalist, but for this Austrian philosopher we can judge an action rationally "only relative to some given ends." Utopianism, however, comes up with new ends or "a more or less clear and detailed description or blueprint of our ideal state." We know these ends "from the dreams of our poets and prophets." They cannot be rationally discussed but "only proclaimed from the housetops." Inasmuch as these ends resist proof, the utopian must use violence to bring them about. The scientist behaves more carefully. "No amount of physics will tell a scientist that it is the right thing for him to construct a plough, or an airplane, or an atomic bomb. Ends must be adopted by him, or given to him."

Yet even Popper admitted that this is almost too simple. Did it mean one must never have ideals or goals but just accept assignments or the status quo? Not exactly. He writes that one must know how to distinguish between "admissible plans for social reform and inadmissible Utopian blueprints." He has some advice: avoid large and distant goals. "Work for the elimination of concrete evils rather than for the realization of abstracts goods. . . . In more practical terms: fight for the elimination of poverty by direct means — for example, by making sure that everybody has a minimal income. Or fight against epidemics and disease by erecting hospitals and schools of medicine. . . . But . . . do not allow your dreams of a beautiful world to lure you

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 159, 165.

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away from the claims of men who suffer here and now." Much could be achieved "if only we could give up dreaming about distant ideals and fighting over our Utopians blueprints for a new world and a new man."[59]

Popper's reasonable argument has echoed down the intellectual corridors of history; each decade it gains more recruits. In the immediate future it would be supplemented by "end of ideology" thinkers such as Raymond Aron in France and Daniel Bell in the United States. Other refugee thinkers would confirm and collaborate Popper's positions. They would expand the category of utopians to include all those with a plan, and they would charge utopians with violence. Implicitly or explicitly, "utopians" meant "Marxists." That much, perhaps most, of twentieth-century mass violence had little to do with utopians barely intruded upon the argument. Were the principal actors of World War I utopians? Were Adolph Eichmann and the Nazis? On this Arendt would change gears, but liberal wisdom, including her own, would not be affected.

Jacob Talmon left Poland in 1934 as a young man to study at the Hebrew University in Palestine. He continued his studies in France, fleeing Paris for London as the Nazis arrived in 1940.[60] He recalled researching "the Jacobin terrorist dictatorship" as the Soviet Union staged the Moscow Trials in 1937 and 1938. The similarities between the Jacobin and Stalinist repression struck him. "The parallel seemed to suggest the existence of some unfathomable and inescapable law which causes revolutionary salvationist schemes to evolve into reigns of terror, and the promise of a perfect direct democracy to assume in practice the form of totalitarian dictatorship."[61]

Talmon's chef-d'oeuvre, his three-volume study entitled *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, *Political Messianism*, and *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution*, written over thirty years (1951 to 1980), traced the history of this "salvationist" ethos. He almost exclusively examined radical, socialist, and Marxist movements from the French Revolution to the Russian. He explained that many historians might be tempted to dismiss the "Messianic ideologies" as the expression of lunatics with "long-winded and utterly unreadable treatises or obscure

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59. Popper, "Utopia and Violence," in *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 355–63.

60. See Talmon's obituary, *New York Times* (June 18, 1980).

61. J. L. Talmon, *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution: The Origins of Ideological Polarisation in the Twentieth Century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1981), p. 535.

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ephemeral journals," who conduct "bizarre experiments in communal living and Utopian communes." This would be a mistake, he believes: these leftist ideas haunt the world.[62]

In *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* Talmon distinguishes what he called "liberal democracy" and "totalitarian Messianic democracy." In terms echoing Popper, he writes that liberal democracy employs "trial and error" and "pragmatic contrivances," and messianic democracy posits a "preordained, harmonious and perfect scheme of things." Inasmuch as an "absolute ideal" drives the totalitarian faith, it ignores, coerces, or intimidates men. "Political Messianism is bound to replace empirical thinking and free criticism with reasoning by definition, based in *a priori* collective concepts which must be accepted whatever the evidence of the senses."[63] Or, as he wrote elsewhere, "the tragic paradox of Utopianism" is that instead of leading to freedom "it brought totalitarian coercion."[64]

Talmon's first volume took up the French Revolution and its aftermath; the second volume explored socialists, Marx, and some virulent conservatives up till 1848. He reaffirmed his basic thesis: "No period before or after has experienced so luxurious a flowering of Utopian schemes." Now he preferred the term "political Messianism" to cover all the "rivers and rivulets into the Revolutionary Messianic flood" of the early nineteenth century. They all shared "the totalitarian-democratic expectations of some pre-ordained, all-embracing" social order that would issue into "real freedom of men."[65] Yet Talmon was too much the honest historian to force the material into his categories. In this volume, and increasingly the next, his information overwhelms his argument, which continues to retreat.[66] He tries to be comprehensive, but everything does not fit. Do the reactionary romantics like de Maistre, who, at best, idolized irrationality, force, and authority, confirm the idea of "political Messianism" or revolutionary utopianism? Talmon summarizes de Maistre but hardly links him to his own argument.

62. J. L. Talmon, *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase* (New York: Praeger, 1960), p. 30.

63. J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1951; reprint, New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 2–3, 253.

64. J. L. Talmon, *Utopianism and Politics* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1957), p. 12.

65. Talmon, *Political Messianism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15, viii.

66. "In its eclecticism," writes Irving Louis Horowitz of *The Myth of the Nation*, "it seems less concerned with establishing a thesis than the earlier volumes," Horowitz, "Introduction to the Transaction Edition," in J. L. Talmon, *Myth of the Nation and Vision of Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), p. xvi.

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The third volume, *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution*, further revises Talmon's thesis. The main theme of modern history, which he had earlier posited as the contest between liberal and totalitarian democracies, now becomes the struggle between totalitarian democracy, as expressed in Bolshevism, and nationalism, as expressed in "Fascism-Nazism." Was Nazism some sort of utopianism? This is not clear, for, like Popper before him, Talmon concentrates on socialism, Marxism, and Bolshevism. In this 600-page volume only a dozen pages take up Nazism. As with Popper, the imbalance in coverage suggests the imbalance in the theory, which almost exclusively focuses on the formation and malformations of Marxism.

In his conclusion Talmon seeks to affirm his argument. He asks forthrightly, what is the relationship between these two totalitarianisms, Bolshevism and Nazism? "If their origins and development were wholly disparate, why the striking similarities in patterns of thought and modes of operating?" Talmon weakly concludes that a "salvationist" ethos marked each: both claimed the truth; both adhered to a "Manichean view of history." Yet the "ultimate differences between messianic totalitarian democracy and Nazi-Fascist totalitarianism" should not be ignored, he admits. Even if the differences "make little difference in practice," the Marxist tradition claimed the French Revolution with its vision of universal brotherhood. The Nazi-Fascists "defiantly and uncompromisingly rejected that vision."[67]

Talmon's *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* had "vast influence among historians," but the larger impact of his work has been limited, and probably has declined since the 1980s, especially compared to that of Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt.[68] Perhaps because he modulated his original thesis as his studies proceeded and respected his findings more than his categories, a militant anti-utopianism finds little support in his work. Only one book by Talmon remains in print, for example, but scores of Arendt's books are available — and over a hundred works about her contributions are on the shelves. She is "the most discussed figure in recent

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67. *Ibid.*, pp. 535–554.

68. This is George L. Mosse writing in "Political Style and Political Theory — Totalitarian Democracy Revisited," in *Totalitarian Democracy and After: International Colloquium in Memory of Jacob L. Talmon* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1984), p. 167. It may illustrate Talmon's declining impact that a subsequent volume in his honor only mentions him in passing; see *The Intellectual Revolt against Liberal Democracy, 1870–1945: International Conference in Memory of Jacob L. Talmon*, ed. by Zeev Sternhell (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1996).

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political theory dissertations," trumpets an admirer.[69] Prizes, stamps, streets, and even a rail connection (between Karlsruhe and Hannover) have been named after her. "Hannah Arendt," concludes Walter Laqueur, "has been more successful than any other German philosopher, living or dead."[70] Isaiah Berlin hardly trails; in fact, he may lead with over sixty volumes of editions, anthologies, and collections in print — virtually everything that Berlin ever wrote or introduced.

In a sign of the times, the enthusiasm for Berlin has extended to encompass even his juvenilia. Oxford University Press recently published a Berlin collection containing a story by the preadolescent sage with learned commentary about its meaning. "While we certainly would do badly to read conceptual opinions into the minds of this twelve-year-old author," qualifies Ian Harris before taking the leap, "the piece reveals the disposition which finds expression in Berlin's mature work." In particular, Harris detects a link between the "cosy little home" in Master Berlin's story and the concept of "negative freedom" in Professor Berlin's theory.

The plot thickens, however. Berlin's literary executor reports that the story won a "hamper of tuck" (an anglicism for sweets) in a children's literary competition — at least according to the mature Berlin. However, this claim has not yet been confirmed by scholarly investigation. "Frustratingly," confesses Berlin's indefatigable editor, Henry Hardy, the 1922 "Tuck Hamper Competition" of *The Boy's Herald* does not list Berlin as a prizewinner. Hardy ponders the delicate situation. Could Berlin have claimed an award he did not receive? Hardy examines other prize submissions. Inasmuch as the other winners are "merely humorous anecdotes" and are much briefer than Berlin's, "perhaps" the judges awarded the youth "an *ex gratia* hamper for an impressive contribution in the wrong genre."[71] The matter awaits further study.

Berlin was born in Riga, Latvia, in 1909 to an affluent Jewish lumber-merchant family that moved to Petrograd in 1915. After the October Revolution his father continued to do business with the Soviets, but he

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69. David Luban, review of *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, in *Ethics* 113, no. 3 (April 2003), p. 724.

70. Walter Laqueur, "The Arendt Cult," in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, ed. by S. E. Aschheim (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 47–48.

71. Ian Harris, "Berlin and His Critics," in *Liberty*, ed. by H. Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.), p. 351; Henry Hardy, "The Editor's Tale," in *Liberty*, ed. by H. Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.), p. xxviii. Berlin's story is in the same volume, "The Purpose Justifies the Ways," pp. 332–35.

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"hated" them from the beginning.[72] Distaste for the Bolsheviks, Russian anti-Semitism, and Berlin's senior's Anglophilia led the family to emigrate to England in 1921, when Berlin was eleven. He explained later that his youthful experience of the Russian Revolution — in particular his witnessing of a Tsarist policeman being dragged off to be lynched — cured him forever of any sympathy for communism.[73] He attended Oxford, and — except for several years during the war when he served the British foreign office as a press-attaché and as first secretary in New York, Washington, and Moscow — he stayed at Oxford in various capacities for the rest of his life.

While Popper was known as cantankerous and lived in "legendary seclusion" in the rural outskirts of London,[74] Berlin was engaging, social, and famously available at Oxford, where he gave innumerable interviews. Popper broke with almost all his students and colleagues and believed himself underappreciated; Berlin took pride in maintaining relations even with his critics and believed his own contribution inflated. Undoubtedly, Berlin's impact hails partly from his charm, demeanor, and social skills.

His work reflects his winning personal traits; his style is conversational, readable — and diffuse. His sentences meander on. "When men, as occasionally happens," begins the title essay in *The Sense of Reality*, "develop a distaste for the age in which they live, and love and admire some past period with such uncritical devotion that it is clear that, if they had their choice, they would wish to be alive then and not now—and when, as the next step, they seek to introduce into their lives certain of the habits and practices of the idealized past, and criticize the present for falling short of, and for degeneration from, this past — we tend to accuse them of nostalgic 'escapism,' romantic antiquarianism, lack of realism; we dismiss their efforts as attempts to 'turn the clock back,' to 'ignore the forces of history' or 'fly in the face of the facts,' at best touching and childish and pathetic."[75]

With the single exception of a small book on Karl Marx, which was written as an introductory text, Berlin wrote essays, and these essays derived almost exclusively from commissioned projects and invited lectures. Berlin was well aware of the limitations of his work. He never pursued a book-length argument, and he revised and softened the

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72. Steven Lukes, "Isaiah Berlin in Conversation with Steven Lukes," in *Salmagundi* 120 (Fall 1998), p. 62.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
74. Hacohen, *Karl Popper*, *op. cit.*, p. 524
75. Isaiah Berlin, "The Sense of Reality," in *The Sense of Reality*, ed. by H. Hardy (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), p. 1.

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pronouncements of even his most famous essays. One tough-minded critic compared the original "four essays" on liberty, published in periodicals, with those in the book and found significant revisions. In adding only a word or deleting a sentence, Berlin sometimes altered a decisive point. He had closed his classic 1950 "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century" by stating that the political problems "are *eo facto* not the central questions of human life. They are not, and never have been, the fundamental issues which embody the changing outlook and the most intense preoccupation of their time and generation."[76] In the book version, Berlin inserted "only" before "central questions," dropped the second sentence and added a couple of murky lines. Political problems now "are *eo facto* not the only central questions of human life" (emphasis added). The notion that they are "never" central has been revoked. Between 1950 and 1969 political issues become fundamental.

Moreover, as Anthony Arblaster, who compared the versions, notes, Berlin frequently made almost random substitutions in his learned lists that established historical lineages of ideas. In the book version, Thomas Hobbes replaces Thomas Aquinas; "Christian Socialists" replace "Bonapartists"; Schopenhauer replaces Tolstoy; Chekhov replaces Marx; De Maistre replaces Machiavelli. Arblaster comments: "The frequency of these changes undermines confidence in Berlin's judgement in selecting the names. Reviewers have often written admiringly about Berlin's 'vast erudition,' 'pyrotechnical brilliance.' . . . Perhaps too many readers have been so blinded by the extraordinary range of references that they have not been able to see clearly enough to consider whether Berlin's grand generalizations really do apply to all the thinkers he links with them."[77]

"Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century" also includes Berlin's signature reference: a quotation from Kant about the "crooked timber of humanity," which appears throughout his essays and as the title of a collection.[78] For Berlin the phrase virtually encapsulates his ideas on pluralism and his distaste for planned utopias. The conclusion to "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century" is pure Berlin in its rejection of utopian planning and its embrace of messy pluralism. We are ensnared in a

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76. Isaiah Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," in *Foreign Affairs* 28 no. 3 (April 1950), p. 385.

77. A. Arblaster, "Vision and Revision: A Note on the Text of Isaiah Berlin's *Four Essays on Liberty*," *Political Studies* 19, no. 1 (March 1971), pp. 81–86.

78. Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, ed. by H. Hardy (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

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dilemma of freedom or government welfare: "The way out must therefore lie in some logically untidy, flexible, and even ambiguous compromise: every situation calls for its own specific policy, since out of the crooked timber of humanity, as Kant once remarked, no straight thing was ever made. What the age calls for is not (as we are often told) more faith or stronger leadership or more rational organization. Rather it is the opposite—less Messianic ardor, more enlightened skepticism, more toleration of idiosyncrasies, more frequent ad hoc and ephemeral arrangements."[79]

While it may be foolhardy to argue with these laudable sentiments, Berlin enlists Kant for his own purposes. As Perry Anderson has observed, "Here, we are given to understand, is a signal expression of that rejection of all perfectionist utopias" by pluralism. Yet Anderson suggests that Berlin, who cites Kant on this score at least eight times in his main essays, distorts his meaning.[80] For one thing, the citation comes from Kant's most utopian writing, his "Idea for a Universal History." In their compendious survey of Western utopianism, Frank and Fritzie Manuel find in this essay "an emotional quality" rarely evident in anything else he wrote. "It represents Kant's utopia and his belief, sometimes a bit faltering, that mankind was getting there, a German version of the dream of reason."[81]

In this little work Kant broaches the possibility of a universal history in which humanity advances toward utopia. As its original 1784 editor stated, "One of Professor Kant's cherished ideas is that the ultimate end of the human race is the attainment of the most perfect civil constitution." He added that Kant points out "the extent to which humanity has at different times approached or distanced itself from this end, as well as what is still to be done to attain it."[82] Moreover, the way that Kant develops this idea of mankind progressing toward perfection is almost the opposite of Berlin's. Kant argues that natural antagonisms force individuals to leave isolation and unfold their talents in society, thereby attaining culture, happiness ("as far as it is possible on earth"), and freedom. Mankind needs a social order to become free. In other words, society that might appear repressive actually provides security and education that permit an individual to prosper. It is not so much that out of the crooked timber of humanity nothing straight can be made, but that to grow straight and true

79. Berlin, "Political Ideas," *op. cit.*, pp. 384–85.
80. Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 232–35.
81. Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought*, *op. cit.*, p. 519.
82. Cited by Ted Humphrey in his edition of "Idea for a Universal History," in Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, ed. by T. Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), p. 40.

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humanity needs a good social order. "It is just as with trees in the forest, which need each other, for in seeking to take the air and sunlight from each other, each obtains a beautiful, straight shape, while those that grow in freedom and separate from one another branch out randomly, and are stunted, bent, and twisted [*krüppelig, schief, und krumm*]." Kant adds that "all the culture and art" of mankind are a product of this discipline; they are the fruit of a social order.[83]

Isaiah Berlin once remarked that he was like a taxicab; hailed, he went in any direction. But this is an overstatement, perhaps a misstatement. Berlin returned again and again to basic themes of pluralism. His much-cited essays from the 1950s hammered away at the virtues of pluralism and the dangers of utopianism. That was his taxi stand. His categories sought to distinguish a dangerous idea of utopian freedom from a benign pluralistic freedom. In "Two Concepts of Liberty," "negative" freedom entails a domain of noninterference. "The wider the area of non-interference the wider my freedom."[84] The problem resides with "positive" freedom, "not freedom from, but freedom to — to lead one prescribed form of life." It fuels many of the "nationalist, communist, authoritarian, and totalitarian creeds of our day." In other words, "negative" freedom constitutes pluralism and "positive" freedom dictatorships.[85]

In earlier formulations (in a series of lectures from 1952), Berlin distinguished two notions of liberty, but here he identified them as Anglo-French and German. "The principal preoccupation of many Western European thinkers was to guard the liberty of the individual against encroachment. . . . What they meant by liberty was non-interference — a fundamentally negative concept." English and French reformers, even revolutionaries, sought to create "a certain vacuum" around the individual, providing a space where one can fulfill one's wishes. "One should not criticize these wishes. Each man's ends are his own; the business of the State is to prevent collisions." Next to this idea, there is "another notion of freedom, which blossomed among the Germans."

Berlin finds the other idea first developed by Fichte, where freedom signifies submission to the collectivity or nation. "What of that individual

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83. Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," ed. Humphrey, p. 33; and "Idee zu einer Allgemeinen Geschichte in Weltbürgerlicher Absicht," in I. Kant, *Werke in Zehn Banden*, ed. W. Weischedel, vol. 9, part 1 (Wiesebaden: Insel Verlag, 1964), p. 40.

84. Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 123.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 144.

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freedom . . . which the British and the French writers defended?" Fichte and those who follow him dissolve the Anglo-French notion into the community, whose greatest force is the leader who molds the nation into "a single organic whole." Here we have two notions of liberty, "the liberal and authoritarian, open and closed."[86] In the later formulation Berlin gave up the national linkage, but renamed as negative and positive, he saw the two kinds of freedom as unfolding in "divergent" directions. "These are not two different interpretations of a single concept [of liberty], but two profoundly divergent and irreconcilable attitudes to the ends of life."[87]

Both as an argument and a piece of intellectual history, Berlin's treatment of liberty leaves much to be desired. One need look no further than Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* to find a position that derails Berlin's. Arnold can hardly be categorized as an adherent of a closed society, yet this liberal thinker enunciated a cogent criticism of what Berlin calls "negative" freedom. Indeed, he entitled one chapter of *Culture and Anarchy* "Doing as One Likes." "Our prevalent notion," he wrote, "is that it is a most happy and important thing for a man merely to be able to do as he likes. On what he is to do when he is thus free to do as he likes, we do not lay so much stress."[88]

Arnold wrote elsewhere "Freedom, like Industry, is a very good horse to ride; — but to ride somewhere." The Englishman who shouts "We are free! we are free!" thinks it is "the highest pitch of development and civilization" when his letters are carried between Islington and Camberwell twelve times a day; and trains run between them four times an hour. "He thinks it is nothing that the trains only carry him from an illiberal, dismal life at Islington to an illiberal, dismal life at Camberwell; and the letters only tell him that such is the life there."[89] For Arnold the relentless English emphasis on "doing as one likes" — in Berlin's terms, celebrating negative freedom — constitutes a failure to look at the ends of freedom and the wider society.

As with many of Berlin's arguments, the lineages established and the details furnished hardly matter. The point, rather, is that Berlin ratifies an inherent and irreducible pluralism that gives the lie to any utopian theorizing

86. Isaiah Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 52, 54, 70–71.

87. Berlin, *Four Essays*, *op. cit.*, pp. 132, 166.

88. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. by S. Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 83.

89. Matthew Arnold, "My Countrymen," in *Selected Prose*, ed. by P. J. Keating (Penguin: New York, 1987), pp. 192–93.

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— perhaps to any theorizing. His insistence on the pluralism of values, the individuality of freedom, and the fraud of total solutions is Berlin's greatest strength, but also his greatest weakness. "There have always been people who have wanted to be secure in some tight establishment . . . in some rigid system," said Berlin in his 1952 lecture on Hegel. "But that is not what we call liberty." Liberty lies in "the ability to choose as you wish to choose, because you wish to choose, uncoerced, unbullied, not swallowed up in some vast system."[90]

Twenty-five years later in "The Decline of the Utopian Ideas in the West," and thirty-five years later in "The Pursuit of the Ideal," Berlin rephrases these ideas, ratifying them with quotes by Kant on the "crooked timber of humanity." "Side by side" with the collision of values, "there persists the age-old dream" that will provide "the final solution to all human ills." But this is an illusion because "ultimate values may be incompatible with one another"; moreover, the illusion is lethal, giving "a wide licence to inflict suffering on other men" for the sake of utopia.[91] The notion of a "perfect whole" or "the ultimate system" is "incoherent" and "unattainable." "The search for perfection does seem to me a recipe for bloodshed." Instead of seeking perfection, we must realize that the "collision of values" is the essence of "what we are." We are "doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss."[92]

These truths teeter on the edge of truisms. They retain a conceptual bite by virtue of context. Verities are worth trumpeting where they are unknown or challenged. But Berlin's propositions are not. His ideas on pluralism and the dangers of utopianism partake of the basic Anglo-American mental household. We should be wary of "drastic action, in personal life or in public policy," he writes, since they may lead to unanticipated suffering. Instead of fighting for a "new and nobler society" we must engage in "utilitarian solutions" and "trade-offs." "The best that can be done, as a general rule, is to maintain a precarious equilibrium that will prevent the occurrence of desperate situations."[93] Stefan Collini remarks on the "collective self-congratulation" in Berlin's rehearsal of the necessity of partial answers. If Berlin had addressed this argument to some real

90. Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

91. Berlin, "The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, ed. by H. Hardy (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), pp. 46–47.

92. Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, ed. by H. Hardy (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), p. 11.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

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opponents in the 1950s, say to Marxist historians like Christopher Hill or Eric Hobsbawm, observes Collini, "it would be easier to see that it was genuinely cutting wood." Offered, however, to the readers of *The New York Review of Books* in the 1980s it has the "reassuringness of a bedtime story."[94]

It is not simply that Berlin preached to the converted; he also muffled his context and argument. He admitted that his "Two Concepts of Liberty" was "deliberately" anti-Marxist. "I was maddened by all the Marxist cheating which went on, all the things that were said about 'true liberty,' [the] Stalinist and communist patter about 'true freedom.'"[95] Yet he never approached his targets closely. He discussed the dangers of utopianism and totalitarianism; he took up Marxism; he appraised past intellectual luminaries; but he stayed safely insulated from his contemporaries.

It is striking, even astonishing, that this much-honored, much-celebrated liberal political philosopher never risked a single sustained encounter with another twentieth-century thinker. He felt at home among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers, most of them Russian, but kept his distance from those of his own century. He must be the only twentieth-century intellectual esteemed for his engagement with the world who successfully avoided engagement with authors of his time.[96] Weber or Freud, Husserl or Heidegger, Camus or Sartre, Benjamin or Adorno: they pass unmentioned by Berlin — or barely mentioned. In typical Berlinian manner, he preempts criticism by humility. "I am told that Heidegger undermined traditional epistemology," he remarks in a footnote, "but since I do not understand his language or views, I am in no position to comment."[97]

Nor does Berlin's biography offer a contrasting picture to his philosophical cautiousness. In political and intellectual worlds alike, Berlin played it safe. Drawing on his personal contact with Berlin and Ignatieff's biography, Christopher Hitchens suggests that Berlin "sometimes felt or saw the need to be courageous, but usually — oh dear — at just the same

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94. Stefan Collini, *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 203–4.

95. Berlin also indicated that Popper's *Open Society and its Enemies* influenced him considerably. See Lukes, "Isaiah Berlin in Conversation," *op. cit.*, p. 92.

96. Of course, there are some minor exceptions; for instance, Berlin reviewed Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* at length in *Mind* 56, no. 222 (April 1947): 151–66. The other exceptions are his brief, invariably laudatory memoirs of twentieth-century acquaintances, collected in Berlin, *Personal Impressions*, ed. by H. Hardy (New York: Viking, 1980).

97. Berlin, *The Sense of Reality*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

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moment that he remembered an urgent appointment elsewhere."[98] His few interventions do not burnish his image as a righteous liberal. He privately helped blackball the Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher, while publicly claiming he did not; he criticized T. S. Eliot for anti-Semitism and diplomatically withdrew the criticism. Ignatieff notes that Berlin sensed that his own politeness "shaded into obsequiousness." On the major issues of the day he either said nothing or vaguely endorsed the establishment. Hitchens summarizes: "In every instance given by Ignatieff, or known to me, from the Cold War through Algeria to Suez to Vietnam, Berlin strove to find a high 'liberal' justification either for the status quo or for the immediate needs of the conservative authorities."[99]

If these comments can be chalked up as leftist gripes, virtually the same charges have emerged from the opposite shore. Tapping, like Hitchins, into his own experience and Ignatieff's biography, the neoconservative Norman Podhoretz finds Berlin guilty of "spinelessness." Berlin praised one of Podhoretz's heroes, Chaim Weizmann, for believing that one must not remain neutral or uncommitted toward the great issues of the day; it is an absolute duty, come what may, to take stands. Yet, Podhoretz notes, "time after time, it was precisely this 'absolute duty' that Berlin failed to discharge." His only criticism of Israel came on his death bed, when he implored the Israelis to accept a compromise and territorial partition with the Palestinians — a position, Podhoretz notes, that put Berlin "solidly in line with the opinion being voiced by practically everyone else."[100] Berlin privately lamented the actions of student radicals in the 1960s but publicly said nothing. "Where was Berlin?" asks Podhoretz. "He was nowhere to be seen. . . . So much for his willingness to stand . . . unflinchingly for his convictions." Podhoretz offers other examples of Berlin's disappearing act and concludes that this "great equivocator" was "fearful" of taking any political stand that "might jeopardize his ever-growing intellectual and social prestige."[101] Berlin's waffling contrasts

98. Christopher Hitchens, "Goodbye to Berlin," in *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 144.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

100. For a different take on these final remarks, see Avishai Margalit, "The Crooked Timber of Nationalism," in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, ed. by M. Lilla *et al.* (New York: New York Review Books, 2001). "What was so surprising was not the content of the letter, but the very fact that he wrote it . . . In his last statement he [Berlin] wanted to stand up and be counted" (p. 158).

101. Norman Podhoretz, "A Dissent on Isaiah Berlin," *Commentary* 107, no. 2 (February 1999): 25.

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sharply with the political forthrightness of the liberal hero from whom he borrowed his ideas about the two forms of liberty. Benjamin Constant, the Swiss-French nineteenth-century liberal publicist, distinguished ancient and modern forms of liberty. For Constant, commerce and private interactions constituted modern liberty. "To be happy," he wrote in 1814, anticipating Berlin, "men need only to be left in perfect independence in all that concerns their occupations, their undertakings, their sphere of activity, their fantasies."[102] The ancients had sought their freedom in the public domain, not in their home or individual activities. The moderns reverse this; they focus on the private sphere. "Our freedom must consist of peaceful enjoyment and private independence."[103]

Constant wrote with eloquence and force about liberty. He was also far ahead of Berlin — as well as very different from him. Constant believed in the "perfectibility" of mankind or a movement towards equality,[104] which would earn him a totalitarian label from Berlin. The Oxford philosopher derived "negative" or modern liberty from a "conception of freedom . . . scarcely older than the Renaissance or the Reformation." It is "comparatively modern. There seems to be scarcely any discussion of individual liberty as a conscious political ideal . . . in the ancient world." For Berlin this conception defines freedom: "The desire not to be impinged upon, to be left to oneself, has been a mark of high civilization."[105]

Constant, more rooted in material life than Berlin, derived the modern idea from new social conditions, not from a new "conception." In his lecture "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns," he enumerates the markedly distinct situation of ancient cities and modern states. In ancient Greece liberty entailed public participation in city government; citizens gathered to discuss and vote. This is no longer possible — nor desirable. Simply the size of modern Britain or the United States forbids direct participation. Second, the abolition of slavery eliminates the "leisure" indispensable for active citizens. "Without the slave population of Athens, 20,000 Athenians could never have spent every day at the public square in discussion." Third, the onset of commerce — read capitalism —

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102. Benjamin Constant, "The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and Their Relation to European Civilization," in *Political Writings*, ed. by B. Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 104.

103. Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," in *Political Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

104. See Constant, "De la Perfectibilité de l'espèce humaine," in *Écrit politiques*, ed. by M. Gauchet (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 700–730.

105. Berlin, *Four Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

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redirects man's activities from public meetings to private business. Now each man is preoccupied with "his speculations, his enterprises, the pleasures he obtains or hopes for." Commerce leaves no time for "the constant exercise of political rights, the daily discussion of the affairs of state . . . the disagreements, confabulations." It inspires a "vivid love of individual independence" and a distaste for government interventions.[106] Today "free men must exercise all professions, provide for all the needs of society."

Yet the rub for Constant, as it must be for any serious political thinker, was the nature of public liberty and how it structured "negative" or private freedoms. He recognized that the strength of modern liberty could be its weakness: an indifference to the larger society — and perhaps an indifference to public despotism. "The danger of modern liberty is that, absorbed in the enjoyment of our private independence, and in the pursuit of our particular interests, we should surrender our right to share in political power too easily."[107] This was not simply a moral point — although it was that as well. As an exile in Göttingen from Napoleon's rule, news reached him that the French army had set Moscow aflame. He wrote a friend, "I cannot be but greatly moved when reflecting on the sum of evil spreading across the land. Apart from those who are directly affected, this event is of some importance. But here, everyone is so wrapped up in study and science that I cannot find one soul . . . to talk about it. A city of 500,000 can be blown up without one professor in Göttingen lifting his eyes from his book."[108]

Private liberty depended on public liberties and their protection by a benign government. In his lecture on ancient and modern liberty, Constant seeks to "combine the two together." He closed on a very Arnoldian tone; he called upon legislators to seek "the moral education of the citizens." Nor were these empty words for Constant; he was a political animal, sometimes an elected deputy and an activist journalist. As a deputy Constant denounced slavery and press censorship;[109] This pursuit of a miscarriage of justice has been compared to Voltaire's intervention in the Calas affair.[110] "Those who accept Isaiah Berlin's portrait of privacy-addicted Constant," wrote Stephen Holmes in his book on Constant,

106. Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients," *op. cit.*, pp. 314–16.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 326.

108. B. Constant to Claude Hochet, October 5, 1812, in Benjamin Constant and Madame de Staël, *Lettres à un ami: Cent onze lettres inédites à Claude Hochet*, ed. J. Mistler (Neuchatel: Baconnière, 1949), p. 225.

109. See B. Constant, "Ecrits sur la liberté de la presse," in *Oeuvre completes*, vol. 9, part 1 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001), pp. 31–190.

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"cannot explain why he devoted the last fifteen years of his life to public service" — not to "cozy town meeting communalism," but to "radical, reformist activism."[111]

Hannah Arendt stood at the opposite pole from Isaiah Berlin in several respects; she was as immoderate as he was cautious. Where he distrusted abstractions, she reveled in them. Her works were often long and ambitious, his short and modest. Just their titles suggest a very different reach. He wrote essays such as "A Note on Vico's Concept of Knowledge;" she wrote books with titles such as *The Human Condition*. I propose, she writes in the prologue, "a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our new experiences and our most recent fears."[112]

Her final work, *The Life of the Mind*, explored nothing less than Western philosophical thought from Plato to Nietzsche. Before her death she had completed "Thinking" and "Willing," published in two volumes, but not the third section on "Judging."[113]

She was, in fact, a master of judgment, as exemplified in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, her account of the Adolph Eichmann trial in Israel. Where Berlin waffled, Arendt took stands. The *New Yorker* magazine published the piece that became her most famous work and continues to provoke the most controversy — as much by its harshness as its argument. "It is that heartless, frequently sneering and malicious tone . . . to which I take exception," declared Gershom Scholem, dean of Jewish studies, in a letter that marked a break with her.[114]

Arendt was born in 1906 in Königsberg, the capital of East Prussia and the home of Immanuel Kant, to a family of reform Jews. Pursuing her university studies in the mid-1920s she fell under the personal and intellectual sway of Martin Heidegger — a relationship that for better or worse decisively colored her work.[115] She put an epigram from Heidegger in the

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110. See Kurt Kloocke, *Benjamin Constant: Une biographie intellectuelle* (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 1984), p. 235.

111. Stephen Holmes, *Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 44.

112. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), p. 6.

113. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1 (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1978).

114. Gershom Scholem, "Letter to Hannah Arendt," in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. by W. J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken, 1976), p. 302.

115. Of course this has been extensively discussed; see Richard Wolin's *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

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first volume of her last book, *The Life of the Mind*, and wanted to dedicate *The Human Condition* to him.[116] If Heidegger and German romanticism served as one pole of her orientation, Zionism — or issues of Jewish identity — served as the other.

Her first book (after her thesis) was a biography of Rahel Varnhagen, an 18th century Berlin salonnière. Her book opened with a deathbed quote from Varnhagen. "The thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life — having been born a Jewess — this I should on no account now wish to have missed."[117] With the rise of Hitler, Arendt helped Jews flee Germany and then escaped herself to Prague and Paris, where she worked for Jewish refugee organizations. In 1941, after the fall of France, Arendt made her way to New York, where she began to make a living as a writer and teacher.

In his letter to Arendt, Scholem disdainfully accused her of sharing attitudes about Judaism typical of German leftist intellectuals. Arendt corrected him about her past. "I am not one of the 'intellectuals who come from the German Left.' You could not have known this, since we did not know each other when we were young."[118] What did Arendt mean? Both her parents were socialists — and as testimony to the depths of their commitment, they had become so when the socialist party was still illegal in Germany. Her family was personally and intellectually close to the Vogelsteins, who were leading Social Democrats.[119] Her mother supported the firebrand Rosa Luxemburg and brought the young Hannah to a demonstration in behalf of the ill-fated revolutionary upsurge spearheaded by the Polish-Jewish agitator. "As they ran through the streets," Elisabeth Young-Bruhl, Arendt's biographer, records, "Martha Arendt shouted to her daughter, 'You must pay attention, this is a historical moment!'"[120]

Whatever their differences in approach and style, Arendt like Berlin, Popper, and the other liberal anti-utopians, paid most attention to Marxism,

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116. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, p. 1. See Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: NYRB, 2001), pp. 38–39.

117. Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*, rev. ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 3. The book was begun in 1930 but not published until 1956.

118. Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah*, ed. R. H. Feldman (New York: Grove Press, 1978), p. 245.

119. In an interview Arendt stated as much: "My mother . . . came out of the Social Democratic movement . . . as did my father." Arendt, "'What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation with Günter Gaus," in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. by P. Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 8.

120. Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9, 28.

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although this is less evident in the book that made her reputation, *Origins of Totalitarianism*. To be sure, *Origins* is a difficult work to follow or summarize. Virtually all commentators note its ungainliness; its sections seem unconnected to an overall argument. In does not help matters that Arendt has a penchant for windy prose and vague abstraction, which she abandoned in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. She frequently employs Heideggerian idioms with unhappy results. "Totalitarian domination . . . bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man." She makes points that only seem profound. "Ideologies are never interested in the miracle of being." And she regularly uses arguments that highlight her learning but go nowhere. Her learned discussion of the origins of "ideology" ranges over the Latin root word *logoi* and the meaning of "idea" in Plato and Kant but says nothing of its real history in Destutt de Tracy, Marxism, and the sociology of knowledge.[121]

Origins provides both a history of anti-Semitism, racism, and imperialism, and a phenomenology of the totalitarian experience of concentration camps and terrorism. For Arendt totalitarianism signifies something radically novel in history — terror for the sake of terror and an effort to transform human nature. Yet when Arendt leaves her murky idiom ("Here, there are neither political nor historical nor simply moral standards but, at the most, the realization that something seems to be involved in modern politics that actually should never be involved in politics as we used to understand it, namely all or nothing — all, and this is an undetermined infinity of forms of human living-together or nothing"), she offers up something familiar as the driving force of totalitarianism: ideology. "The aggressiveness of totalitarianism springs not from the lust for power . . . nor for profit, but only for ideological reasons: to make the world consistent, to prove that is respective supersense has been right."[122]

Though the starting point is very different, Arendt ends up very close to Popper; she sharply contrasts a deadly "ideology" and something she

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121. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd ed. (New York: World Publishing, 1958), pp. 475, 468–69. For instance, out of vast literature on ideology, see George Lichtheim, *The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1967); and Brian William Head, *Ideology and Social Science: Destutt de Tracy and French Liberalism* (Dordrecht: Maartinus Nijhoff, 1985). To be sure, Arendt knew Mannheim's book, since she reviewed it in 1930; see Hannah Arendt, "Philosophie und Soziologie: Anlässlich Karl Mannheim, Ideologie und Utopie," *Die Gesellschaft* 1 (1930): 163–76.

122. Arendt, *Origins*, 2nd ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 443, 458.

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simply calls "common sense." It is this distinction that puts her in the circle of Popper, Berlin, and the other anti-utopians. To be sure, unlike Popper she exempts virtually all of Western philosophy from the sin of totalitarianism. "Nazism owes nothing to any part of the Western tradition, be it German or not, Catholic or Protestant, Christian, Greek or Roman. . . . Nazism is actually the breakdown of all German and European traditions, the good as well as the bad."[123] Arendt does not conjure up a totalitarian Plato or Hegel; here she appears at the opposite of Popper. This is no small difference. Yet when she sought to generalize about the motor of totalitarianism, she targeted the familiar "ideology," a cousin of utopia. "Ideology" serves as the linchpin for her analysis of totalitarianism, and "ideology" is to Arendt what "historicism" is to Popper — a logical, closed system that posits the laws of history and that issues into mass murder.

With its iron logic and utopian vision, "ideology" produces totalitarianism, she wrote in her original conclusion to *Origins*: "While the totalitarian regimes are thus resolutely and cynically emptying the world of the only thing that makes sense to the utilitarian expectations of common sense, they impose upon it at the same time a kind of supersense which the ideologies actually always meant when they pretended to have found the key to history or the solution to the riddles of the universe. Over and above the senselessness of totalitarian society is enthroned the ridiculous supersense of its ideological superstition. . . . Common sense trained in utilitarian thinking is helpless against this ideological supersense, since totalitarian regimes establish a functioning world of no-sense."[124]

The first chapter of *Origins* is titled "Antisemitism as an Outrage to Common Sense." While Arendt might seem an unlikely defender of common sense, she regularly underscored the opposition of a deadly ideology and a reasonable utilitarianism. Her final chapter of the revised *Origins*, "Ideology and Terror," argues that ideology fueled totalitarianism. Ideologies claim "total explanations"; they are "independent of all experience"; and they are "absolutely logical. . . . You can't say A without saying B and C and so on, down to the end of the murderous alphabet."[125]

To be sure, the hodgepodge of German fascist ideas hardly seemed a paradigm of logic, and Arendt presents her case about the terrorist rigor of

123. P. Aschheim, "Nazism, Culture, and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*," *op. cit.*, pp. 17–18. "Approaches to German Problem in her Essay on Understanding."

124. Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), pp. 431–32. This conclusion was dropped from later editions.

125. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 470–72.

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ideology with no examples from Nazism. Like Popper and Berlin, she articulates an argument that hardly applies to Nazism; like them, she directs her heavy conceptual artillery predominantly at Marxism. In a close study of *Origins*, Roy T. Tsao notes that while Arendt spends many pages on Nazism, she bases her central argument on Stalinism. Apparently she changed her mind while writing the book — indeed, after handing in most of the manuscript. Originally she planned to examine solely Nazism; later she decided to take up totalitarianism in the final part, but that concluding section bore little relationship to the preceding discourses on anti-Semitism and imperialism.[126] Much of what she writes about totalitarianism could only be applied to Stalinism — her references to "selflessness" in the movement and confessions at show trials clearly refer to the Soviet experience. Popper called it historicism; Arendt called it ideology. Ideology "promises to explain all historical happenings, the total explanation of the past, the total knowledge of the present, and reliable prediction of the future."[127]

But this is not the whole of the matter. The absolute novelty of the totalitarian system impressed Arendt. She called its unprecedented mix of ideology and state terror "absolute evil," an entity alien to Western philosophy. "It is inherent in our entire philosophical tradition that we cannot conceive of a 'radical evil.' . . . We actually have nothing to fall back on in order to understand a phenomenon that . . . breaks down all standards we know."[128] What is "absolute evil?" Arendt can not be precise. We may say that "radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous."

Karl Jaspers, Arendt's philosophical friend, questioned this formulation, and she tried to explain it to him: "Evil has proved to be more radical than expected." The Western tradition can only understand sinful and selfish motives. "Yet we know that the greatest evils or radical evil has nothing to do anymore with such humanly understandable, sinful motives." Radical evil renders human beings "superfluous."[129] Arendt's thinking remains obscure here. Did she think that "the manipulators of this system believe in

126. See Roy T. Tsao, "The Three Phases of Arendt's Theory of Totalitarianism," *Social Research* 69, no. 2 (Summer 2002). For an overview, see Steven E. Aschheim, "Nazism, Culture, and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*," *op. cit.*, pp. 122–36.

127. Arendt, *Origins*, 2nd ed., *op. cit.*, p. 470.

128. *Ibid.*, p. 459.

129. Arendt to Jaspers, March 4, 1951, in Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence, 1926–1969*, ed. by L. Kohler and H. Saner (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York, 1992), p. 166.

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their own superfluousness as much as in that of others" and that they are "all the more dangerous" because they do not care if they live or die? Does this fit Hitler and other leading Nazis? Stalin and the Bolsheviks?

The problem however, is not only Arendt's frequent vagueness or woolly terminology. Rather, it is the extent to which she tacitly withdrew her influential totalitarian theory when she covered the Eichmann trial ten years later. It testifies to her intellectual openness that she recast her thinking about the nature of evil when she confronted Eichmann, but it throws the argument of *Origins* into doubt. Scholem observed that Arendt had previously identified "radical evil" as characterizing totalitarianism. "At that time," he wrote mockingly to her, "you had not yet made your discovery, apparently, that evil is banal." The subtitle of her Eichmann book read "A Report on the Banality of Evil." Arendt admitted the shift. "You are quite right: I changed my mind and do no longer speak of 'radical evil.'" She explained that "it is indeed my opinion now that evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension."[130]

This was not a diplomatic statement on Arendt's part. She mentioned her altered outlook to various people. She wrote to her friend Mary McCarthy that the Eichmann book stands partly "in conflict" with the totalitarianism study. The notion of the "banality of evil" opposes that of "radical evil." Moreover, she told McCarthy, she had exaggerated the impact of ideology in the earlier book. "One sees that Eichmann was much less influenced by ideology than I assumed in the book on totalitarianism. The impact of ideology upon the individual may have been overrated by me."[131]

Arendt framed her uncompleted *Life of the Mind* as exploring this problem. She explained that she had come to Eichmann's trial drenched in a Satanic notion of evil. "However, what I was confronted with was utterly different. . . . I was struck by a manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the incontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motives." The doer, she wrote in the introduction to *The Life of the Mind*, was "quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous. There was no sign in him of firm ideological convictions or of specific evil motives."[132]

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130. Arendt to Scholem, July 24, 1963, in *The Jew as Pariah*, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

131. Arendt to McCarthy, September 20, 1963, in *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949–1975*, ed. by C. Brightman (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), pp. 147–48.

132. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

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With these observations, the pillars of her totalitarianism theory buckle. In the continuing controversy sparked by *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, few noticed how her argument contradicted *Origins*. Reviewers had other fish to fry. More recent and scholarly explorations note a shift of position but rarely pursue the issue. The Arendt experts generally see the later book as embellishing or filling-out the former. "*Eichmann in Jerusalem* must be regarded therefore as a partial sequel to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*," writes one scholar.[133] "Does the concept of radical evil that Arendt analyzes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 'contradict' (as Scholem claimed) Arendt's notion of the banality of evil?" asks Richard J. Bernstein. Answer: "No!"[134] "Banality," writes Margaret Canovan, was really "a more accurate way" of describing what she had said about totalitarianism.[135] As Dana R. Villa, one of the best Arendt scholars puts it, "commentators have tried to diminish the force" of Arendt's "'change of mind,' arguing, for example, that the notion of 'radical evil' is compatible with that of the 'banality of evil,' or that, under totalitarianism, radical evil becomes banal."[136]

One chapter of the Eichmann book is called "Duties of a Law-Abiding Citizen." The conclusion seems difficult to avoid. The lesson she drew from the Eichmann case on the "banality of evil" directly contradicts the central idea of *Origins*: demonic evil driven by ideology. Eichmann represented bureaucratic evil beyond ideology. Perhaps the Eichmann book can be seen as a rejoinder to her baroque language and Heideggerian

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133. Stephen J. Whitfield, *Into the Dark: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), p. 225. See Barry Sharpe, *Modesty and Arrogance in Judgment: Hannah Arendt's* Eichmann in Jerusalem (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999.)

134. Richard J. Bernstein, "Did Hannah Arendt Change Her Mind? From Radical Evil to the Banality of Evil," in *Hannah Arendt Twenty Years Later*, ed. by L. May and J. Kohn (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 142.

135. Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 24. This book is a learned airbrushing of Arendt's thought. Faced with the relentless obscurities, contradictions, and illogic of Arendt, Canovan offers statements like the following: "As so often when reading Arendt, it is easy to underestimate the complexity of her thinking" (p. 171).

136. Dana R. Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 56. Oddly, Villa himself has changed his mind—in this very same volume: "The criticism I make of Arendt here departs from the more sympathetic reading I give of her notion of radical evil in that essay [chapter 1]" (p. 231). Adi Ophir tries to reconcile her notions of evil; see Adi Ophir, "Between Eichmann and Kant: Thinking on Evil After Arendt," in *History and Memory* 8, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 89–136.

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philosophizing of *Origins*. When she approached the concrete reality, she discovered how wrong she had been. Ernst Gellner put it this way: "After she had given a kind of account of totalitarianism [in *Origins*] which was half Kafka's *The Trial* and half Wagner, the ordinariness of Eichmann was bound to strike and puzzle her."[137]

The issue, here, however is less the shift in Arendt's position and more how it affected her earlier anti-utopian ideas. In letters and in the preface to *Life of the Mind*, Arendt admitted she surrendered the notion of "radical" evil. Yet she never openly stated or considered how her change of mind revoked her earlier theory of totalitarianism. For countless readers the message of *Origins*, which targets an evil utopian ideology, repealed as it is by *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, retains its validity.

The anti-utopian ethos has swept all intellectual quarters. Utopia has lost its ties with alluring visions of harmony and has turned into a threat. Conventional and scholarly wisdom associates utopian ideas with violence and dictatorship. The historical validity of this linkage, however, is dubious. Already with More, though, utopianism spawned an angry anti-utopianism. This may be prototypical. The newly converted are haunted by their own sins; they seek to slay their past selves. "The final battle would be between the Communists and the ex-Communists," wrote Richard Crossman in his introduction to *The God That Failed*.[138] The utopian More becomes the anti-utopian More. The Marxist Popper becomes the anti-Marxist Popper. Of course, more than psychology is at work. Beginning in the sixteenth century and increasingly in later centuries, utopian thought inspired individuals to revamp the real world — and provoked others to block this effort. Anti-utopianism is not simply a psychological rejoinder, but a political reply to the political project of realizing utopia.

The record of utopian-inspired politics, including socialism and communism, is decidedly mixed. Yet it would be a gross distortion to attribute twentieth century violence mainly to utopians. Unfortunately, this attribution has become an enduring legacy of liberal anti-utopians from Popper to Berlin. Using a notion of totalitarianism that blurs the distinction between Nazism and Stalinism, they identify utopianism—also labeled "historicism," "positive liberty," and "ideology"—as the source of modern

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137. Ernst Gellner, *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 84–85. Also see Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), pp. 147–57.

138. Richard Crossman, introduction to *The God That Failed*, by André Gide *et al.*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1952), p. 10. Crossman is citing Ignazio Silone.

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totalitarianism. To the degree that this is accurate, it addresses Stalinism and authoritarian communism but not Nazism, fascism, murderous nationalism, lethal racism, and religious sectarianism — the stuff that increasingly provokes modern bloodletting.

The imbalance of this liberal critique derives partly from biography. Marxism attracted these scholars in a way that Nazism could not. For a few years, Popper considered himself a communist. Both of Arendt's husbands had been Marxists; and her arguments about totalitarianism bear the imprint of the second, Heinrich Blücher (to whom she dedicates *Origins of Totalitarianism*), a former member of the German Communist Party.[139] Moreover, Marxism was a worthy target for these critics simply because of its intellectual heft and legitimacy. The "enemy" of the open society for Popper is Marxist totalitarianism. He barely mentions Nazism. Ditto for Talmon and Berlin. Could Popper have written two volumes attacking Nazi philosophy as he did Platonic-Hegelian logic? Probably not, since an articulate Nazi philosophy barely existed. This does not mean he and his colleagues were unconcerned with virulent nationalism or fascism: not at all, but their theories hardly addressed these subjects. Large sections of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, for example, take up anti-Semitism and Nazism. Yet these topics do not figure into Arendt's theory of totalitarianism, where she limits her comments to a sometime utopian "ideology" with little application to Nazism.

The point here is not to defend Marxism; it is to defend utopianism — or its iconoclastic version. Marxism does not exhaust utopianism, and to damn Marxism is not necessarily to damn utopian thought. The point is also to expose the confusion, or the intellectual sleight of hand, by which utopia is banished in the name of violence that can be far more justly attributed to bureaucrats, nationalists, and religious sectarians than to dreamers.

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139. See Dan Diner, "Hannah Arendt Reconsidered: Über das Banale and das Böse in ihrer Holocaust-Erzählung," in *Hannah Arendt Revisited: 'Eichmann in Jerusalem' und die Folgen*, ed. by G. Smith (Frankfurt: Surhamp, 2000), pp. 131–32; and William David Jones, *The Lost Debate: German Socialist Intellectuals and Totalitarianism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 202–3.

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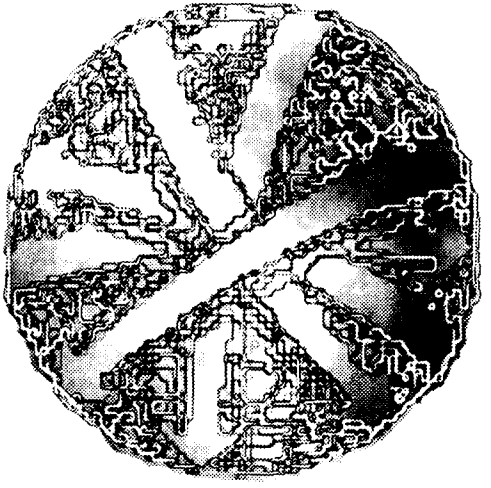

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Georg Simmel's Metropolis: Anticipating the Postmodern

James Bergey

In his book *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture* (1993), Massimo Cacciari states that "the problem of the Metropolis, as a problem of the relation between modern existence and its forms, is the point from which all of Georg Simmel's philosophy develops."[1] That is to say, Simmel used the phenomenon of the Metropolis as an arena to illustrate the distinctions and relations between his concepts of "form" and "content" and the manner in which those concepts relate to human social life. Before a textual analysis of Simmel's essay is attempted, we should familiarize ourselves with what he means by these concepts.

For Simmel, "content," or the realm of content, is the raw material that enters into all human *experience* (some have compared this to George Santayana's "realm of essences").[2] Humans do not experience individual or multiple contents as they exist in themselves; rather, we ascribe shape and meaning to them via our psychological experience. This is where "form" enters into play. Forms interpret and categorize content in order to render it immediately recognizable to us. Examples include art, religion, value — even reality — yet there exists no definitive list of forms. They are fluid and adaptive depending upon the demands of the content. For Simmel, much of his work (and the work of the social philosopher, he

1. Massimo Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, tr. by Stephen Sartarelli (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 3. When writing of Simmel's Metropolis, Cacciari utilizes the capital M. For the purposes of consistency, I will do the same.

2. Rudolph H. Weingartner, "Georg Simmel," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 7, ed. by Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan & The Free Press, 1967), p. 442-443.

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would argue) is dedicated to the study of social forms since "they inform not only the cognitive realm, but any and all dimensions of human experience."[3] By using the Metropolis as an arena to study, identify, and interpret social forms, we can now understand why Cacciari situated the Metropolis as a central point of reference for Simmel's thought.

In his essay, Simmel begins his inquiry by asking the question of "how the personality accommodates itself in the adjustments to external forces."[4] This is what he sets as his task. It is in effect a psychological inquiry and, given Simmel's concern with form and content, we can recognize the driving force behind this task. In much the same manner that subsequent commentators describe modern (or postmodern) society, Simmel identifies a mass of objective phenomena present in Metropolitan life "that exist well in excess of the assimilating capacity of any member of society."[5] This depiction of contemporary life is similar to that posited by Frederic Jameson when he describes the "bewildering immersion" individuals experience in society.[6] For Simmel, individuals deal with this reality by "developing an organ" (that is to say, an intellectually constructed coping mechanism) to protect themselves from the "uprooting" tendencies of the external Metropolitan environment.[7] However, there is another external element (also identified by Jameson) which affects individual personality and can eventually dominate it. Drawing upon themes originally developed in his previous work, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), Simmel states that the "money economy and the dominance of the intellect are intrinsically connected."[8] Here Simmel begins to offer a critical assessment of market capitalism that identifies some of the damaging aspects it holds for individual and social life. Following Marx before him while anticipating the countless commentators to follow, Simmel describes how the market "irreparably...hollows out the core of things" and "becomes the most frightful leveler."[9] In a passage that appears to directly foreshadow Herbert Marcuse's critique of market capitalism,

3. Donald N. Levine, ed., *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. xv.

4. George Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. by Richard Sennett (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), p. 47.

5. Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 31.

6. Michael J. Dear, *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 55.

7. Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," *op. cit.*, p. 48.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

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Simmel observes how the mass of objective culture is leveled by the market and dominates the lives of individuals.[10] In order to compensate for this condition and preserve our own subjective self worth, individuals that live in the Metropolis develop what Simmel has termed a "blasé attitude."[11] Adopting the blasé attitude is another attempt by the intellect to protect the individual's subjective self — in this instance by de-valuing the entire objective world. Ideally, this action would serve to maintain the individual's subjective self worth at a level elevated above that of the de-valued objective world. For Simmel, this act of seeming self-preservation unavoidably drags our own subjective personality into the de-valued worthlessness of the objective world.[12] How and why does this happen? The realities of Metropolitan life force the individual to withdraw or act in reserve from others. Individuals lack the "psychic equipment" to effectively deal with the sheer mass of population on a one-to-one basis — it would be too overwhelming a task if attempted (think here again of Jameson and the "bewildering immersion"). Simmel argues that we ignore others and avoid contact as well as developing an antipathy toward others coupled with a latent antagonism.[13] Otherwise, the individual could not function in a Metropolitan environment. Accordingly, "what appears in the metropolitan style of life directly as dissociation is in reality . . . one of its elemental forms of socialization."[14] In other words, in order to be socially competent within the Metropolis, the individual is socialized into becoming anti-social — degrading the individual's subjective self-worth by harming his or her ability to engage positively with other individuals.

However, there is another side to Metropolitan life — a by-product of the one just described. The Metropolis affords the individual a kind of "personal freedom" that for Simmel has no other analogy with any other existing social environment.[15] No longer bound by the strictures of rural or small town life, the individual is faced with an unbridled freedom to explore a vast range of personal interests without fear of condemnation or censure. Simmel is quick to note, however, that the possession or availability of this freedom does not necessarily guarantee comfort, given that

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10. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), esp. pp. 1-18.
11. Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," *op. cit.*, pp. 49-51.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*

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a city comprised of indifference and antipathy can be a rather cold place.[16] There also remains the spectre of the omnipresent market. Simmel states that "the horizon of the city expands in a manner comparable to the way wealth develops."[17] That is to say, it is this "meta-expansion" of the market, coupled with a population mass that have adopted a blasé attitude which enables the Metropolis to be the locus of this freedom. Simmel takes pains to describe the particular dynamic of this personal freedom. It is a freedom that consists of more than simply an ease of anonymous mobility and lack of censure. It also entails the individual's unique inner expression in the living of his or her day-to-day life.[18] This is in part due to the market which generates the highly specialized division of labor and offers a vast number of opportunities for individual self expression — a condition found only in the Metropolis. However, many critics of the market will argue that the constant "competition for gain," apart from serving as a daily struggle in and of itself, can act to limit personal freedom in other forms. Conceding this point before it is made, Simmel identifies a tendency of the market to engender contrived personal expressions designed to allow the individual to "stand out" and draw attention in an otherwise "bewildering" and "blasé" environment.[19] This contrived personal expression is born out of a need (not normally encountered in a non-Metropolitan setting) for the individual to experience recognition within the anonymous, indifferent and antipathetic mass.

It is at this point in his essay that Simmel embarks upon a detailed discussion of the subjective versus objective realities engendered by the Metropolis. In following his dichotomy with respect to content and form, Simmel posits the concept of the *subjective* (that which we create and manifest for ourselves) versus the *objective* (that which we impart to the outside world).[20] Historically, individuals have lived with this dichotomy in a more or less equally reciprocal state. In Metropolitan society, Simmel argues that the heretofore described dynamic of city life produces and encourages a growing schism between this dichotomy, resulting in the objective outside reality vastly overshadowing that of the subjective self.[21] The predominance of the objective reality (what Jameson might

16. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
21. *Ibid.*

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term "hyperspace"), coupled with an increasing division of labor produced by the market, overwhelms the subjectivity of the individual, resulting in alienation and anomie. Despite the personal freedoms and vast choices open to the individual within the Metropolis, Simmel argues that the "impersonal contents" of these offerings "tend to displace" genuine subjective interpretations and creativity.[22]

If Simmel had ended his essay on this note, he would have joined a long line of commentators who see little more to urban life than degradation, exploitation and decadence. But I argue that Simmel does not stop here because he can not bring himself to wholly condemn the Metropolitan existence. Why? Simmel identifies three forms of individualism made available and nourished by the existence of the Metropolis as defined up to this point:

Individual independence

Realization and elaboration of the individual character itself

Individual distinction from other individuals

Simmel states that "the character of man's values is no longer the 'general human being' in every individual, but rather man's qualitative uniqueness and irreplaceability."[23] For Simmel, it is the "function" of the Metropolis to provide an arena for the "struggle" and "reconciliation" of these multi-individualisms and values.[24] Viewed in this light, the Metropolis presents itself as an untested venue for the creative exploration of individual self-expression and awareness open to endless possibilities. For Simmel, the Metropolis is a "unique place" that presents unlimited "meanings for the development of psychic existence."[25] Simmel continues: "The metropolis reveals itself as one of those great historical formations in which opposing streams which enclose life unfold, as well as join one another with equal right."[26]

While the Metropolis does indeed foster alienation and threatens the very existence of the subjective self, Simmel can find no other historical-social reference that offers the degree of freedom and individual expression found in the modern Metropolis. Why is this important to Simmel? It may have something to do with the historical context within which Simmel was writing. By stating that "the character of man's values" now reside within the individual's "qualitative uniqueness and irreplaceability," Simmel may have been anticipating the "crisis" in value justification

22. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*

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prevalent in contemporary "postmodern" discourse.[27] As a reader of Nietzsche, Simmel may have shared Nietzsche's concern that certain conditions might be necessary in order to allow individuals the opportunity to create new valuations once previous or current ones are deemed to be outmoded and discarded. It may be that, despite all of its faults, Simmel viewed the Metropolis as the very arena where the personal freedom required for bold creation could be found.

Despite his insights and forward thinking, is it possible to credit Simmel with a greater degree of interpretive foresight than what he actually possessed? A writer like Massimo Cacciari might say yes. Cacciari begins his critique of Simmel by posing what he argues is a fundamental question: "What is meant by Metropolis?"[28] Interpreting Simmel, Cacciari states that "the Metropolis is the general form assumed by the process of the rationalization of social relations."[29] Therefore, the Metropolis itself is a "form" in the Simmelian sense. As noted earlier, the omnipresence of the market requires us to recognize that the Metropolis also entails the "rationalization of the relations of production." For Cacciari, the reality of the Metropolis is a "determinant moment of modern existence" in Simmel's thought.[30] This is because the form of the Metropolis is actually in itself a process that Simmel has termed *Vergeistigung*. This can probably best be described as a process of the realization or development of mental life — intellectual life.[31] Therefore, Cacciari argues, Simmel's conception of intellectual life can be understood as "the life of the Metropolis itself."[32] Hence the Metropolis' role as a "determinant moment of modern existence" for Simmel. In Cacciari's interpretation: "There is no truly developed *Geist* [intellectual spirit/intellectual life] beyond the 'metropolitan type' . . . nor any Metropolis that does not express the life of the mind — of reason, that is, in a fully developed form that has successfully integrated within itself the sphere of the social, in all of its ramifications."[33] Following Simmel's positing of the subjective/objective dichotomy, this

27. *Ibid.*
28. Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. In his references to Simmel's essay, Cacciari draws from the original German. Therefore, his critique includes many German words and expressions that resist easy translation. *Vergeistigung* is one of these terms. Given Cacciari's use of it, I have taken this word as describing a process where the mental or intellectual life of the mind undergoes a progressive self realization and development — in short, individual intellectual development.
32. Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
33. *Ibid.*

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then becomes the objective reason for the Metropolis.

In addition to its definition as an objective process, the Metropolis is also a dialectical concept in that it has as its base the antithesis between the "life of the sense perceptions" and the "intellectual life."[34] This is the psychological base from which the "metropolitan type" originates. Keep in mind that the multiplicity of options, choices, population mass, etc., of the objective Metropolis presents itself as an unintelligible blur to the individual's senses, resulting in the development of a mental "organ" to effectively deal with potentially "uprooting" sensory input. It is at this point that Cacciari claims we arrive at the "first precise definition" of the Metropolis: "It dissolves individuality into the current of impressions and reintegrates these, precisely by virtue of their constitution, into the overall process of *Vergeistigung* [the process of the realization and development of intellectual life] . . . [T]he Metropolis uproots individuality from its conservative fixity; the process begun by this uprooting will of necessity lead to the dialectical reasoning that governs, measures, and directs social relations. . . the interest of the Metropolis."[35]

As noted earlier, both the subjective and objective world of the individual, along with the market and the Metropolis itself are all inextricably linked. This prompts Cacciari to lay out what he views as a cyclical pattern present in Simmel's analysis: Individual sense perceptions correspond to the "continuous and relentlessly innovated transubstantiation of exchange value into use value."[36] "The intellect. . . in turn abstracts from the appearance of use value the substance of exchange value; it extracts money from the process and. . . produces merchandise."[37]

The Metropolis enables all of these instances to be reciprocally functional. In this cycle, the market penetrates human individuality and shapes it. For Cacciari, "the process of the individual's internalization of the monetary market economy marks the final and most important part of Simmel's analysis."[38] Now the dialectical cycle is complete. In Cacciari's interpretation, when the process of the realization and development of intellectual life (*Vergeistigung*) in conjunction with the market is completed within the arena of the Metropolis, individual autonomy no longer exists independent of that very process.

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34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
38. *Ibid.*

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Cacciari argues that this is demonstrated by the existence of the "blasé attitude." He writes that "the blasé type fully reflects the structure of the Metropolis... because he understands it from the perspective of his own inability to go beyond it, that is, from the perspective of his own negated individuality."[39]

From this account, we are left again with a negative indictment of Metropolitan life where, echoing Marcuse's market analysis, the individual finds his or her individuality shaped, absorbed and ultimately trapped within the finite circle of market production and consumption. However, we are still left with Simmel's statement that "it is the function of the metropolis to provide the area for this struggle and its reconciliation" of the multiplicity of individual freedoms offered by the Metropolis and the role that individuals might play within that arena.[40] In addressing this statement of Simmel's, Cacciari argues that this attempt by Simmel to reduce or deflate his negative critique of the Metropolis is "no accident."[41] Cacciari cites Ferdinand Tönnies as attempting to effect a similar downgrading of the negative in his classic work, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887). In Simmel's case, Cacciari believes that his goal is to capture and articulate the specific dialectic of the Metropolis while remaining free from any negative or utopian judgements. That is to say, Simmel's objective is to execute a form of scientific demystification as opposed to presenting an ideologically loaded polemic. Cacciari interprets this objective as an effort by Simmel to move closer to the type of analysis practiced by Max Weber.[42]

It strikes one as somewhat odd that an insightful commentator like Cacciari would spend a good deal of time analyzing Simmel's work and taking pains to present it as a valid and important contribution to urban theoretical discourse but then give short shrift to a profound and compelling aspect of his work. Cacciari argues that Walter Benjamin picks up the analysis of the Metropolis where Simmel left off by interpreting the process of Metropolitan life as a "further moment of the domination of capital as a structure of society."[43] As this paper has attempted to illustrate, that is clearly not where Simmel leaves off. Simmel concludes his essay by describing the Metropolis as a "unique place, pregnant with inestimable

39. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
40. Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," *op. cit.*, p. 60.
41. Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 9.

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meanings for the development of psychic existence."[44] Why ignore or gloss over this aspect of Simmel while accepting, drawing from and ascribing validity to only certain elements of his analysis? The problem stems from the efforts by certain theorists to shoehorn Simmel's theory into their own totalizing framework. That which does not fit is jettisoned while the rest is claimed and adapted.

In the case of Cacciari, this appears quite clear. As a Marxist theorist of aesthetics, Cacciari interprets and restates Simmel's general observations about "money" and the "money economy" in Marxist terms of "modes of production" and "commodification." Simmel's insights describing how the market impacts and shapes each individual's life resulting in alienation within the Metropolis does indeed support most Marxist critiques of capitalist culture. When Simmel includes the caveat about Metropolitan uniqueness and the opportunities for a unique kind of individual freedom, Cacciari views it as an effort to emulate Max Weber — an effort for which Simmel, in hindsight, may be excused and "forgiven." Was this Simmel's aim? It is well known that Simmel was unable to land a fully accredited university position until one year prior to his death. Many have attributed this to Simmel's Jewish heritage and the heavy anti-Semitic leanings of the nineteenth century German academy. However, more than a few commentators have argued that his shunning by the academy had more to do with an iconoclasm of style than with any ethnic or religious background. Zygmunt Bauman writes that the substance of Simmel's sociology was "so blatantly at odds with the standard sociological writings of the time" that it took the "academic sociologists many years to admit Simmel into the canon of their tradition."[45] And in a discussion of Simmel's academic marginality, Donald Levine argues that Simmel's "extraordinary originality" as a writer and thinker predisposed him "toward academic nonconformity from an early age."[46] This appears hardly indicative of someone attempting to emulate Max Weber – either in theory or in practice.

Another example of how Simmel's thought is selectively used, misused or rejected by others is convincingly presented by Georg Lukács. A former student of Simmel's, Lukács went on to become one of the 20th century's great Marxist theorists of literature and aesthetics. In his classic

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44. Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," *op. cit.*, p. 60.
45. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca: Cornell Univrsity Press, 1991), p. 185.
46. Levine, *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, *op. cit.*, pp. x-xi.

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book, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Lukács devotes a central chapter to his concept of "reification" where he draws heavily from Simmel's discussion of the subjective versus objective self without directly referencing him.[47] Ernst Bloch, another student of Simmel who would eventually become one of the leading Marxist philosophers articulating the concept of Utopia, broke off his relationship with Simmel despite the latter's early support of him. Frustrated by "Simmel's inability to commit himself to any of the positions he was so adept at expounding," the final straw for the young Marxist broke when Simmel lent his support to the wave of patriotism that swept Germany during the First World War.[48] Similarly, Walter Benjamin, the brilliant aesthetician associated with the Frankfurt School, utilized the form of the Metropolis to illustrate the extent to which market capitalism has dominated all aspects of society (as noted previously by Cacciari).

There are others, however, who claim that Simmel, like Nietzsche, was far ahead of his time in anticipating future academic debate. Zygmunt Bauman argues that Simmel's explanation for the failure of the Enlightenment project to live up to its promise of a "'harmonious' perfection of society and its members" remains unsurpassed to this day.[49] Bauman credits Simmel with viewing the increased specialization of the academic disciplines as encouraging "partial intellectuals" (a term later "coined" by Michel Foucault) and preventing the apprehension of true wisdom.[50] Throughout his many books, Bauman frequently returns to Simmel's depiction of "The Tragedy of Culture." Bauman writes: "'The tragedy of culture,' for Simmel, consists in the fact that science, technology, arts, all spawned by the thrust of the human spirit towards melioration and perfection, become increasingly irrelevant to their creator and their initial purpose, and this because of their very success. . . To put it a different way, Simmel's vision is one of the progressive 'tapering' of the location where the civilizing intentions of the Enlightenment may retain their impetus . . .

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47. See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, tr. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), esp. pp. 86-89. In fairness to Lukács, he does make two brief references to Simmel in this text. Yet, the passages explicitly detailing the subjective versus objective condition which appear to be borrowed directly from Simmel's essay inspire no reference to him from Lukács.

48. For a brief account of Bloch's relationship to Simmel, see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), pp. xx-xxi.

49. Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 156-157.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

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In such a world, the intellectual. . . must be a tragic, homeless wanderer. His tragedy is exacerbated by the realization that no one of the many specialized enclaves of Reason is likely to welcome him. . . . [M]ost will not remember him even as their venerable — if out of date — ancestor.[51]

In thinking about this passage, one is reminded again of Nietzsche and his depictions of the Last Man and the Overman.[52] As suggested earlier, Simmel is concerned about that part of society which may or may not accommodate a truly individual and creative intellectual. It has also been suggested that it was Simmel's own intellectual iconoclasm that effectively kept the door shut on an official university position. In effect, Simmel himself is the "tragic, homeless wanderer" rejected by the "specialized enclaves of Reason." It was Simmel's broad academic interests that first attracted the admiration of a young Ernst Bloch. After Bloch's adoption of Marxism, Simmel's refusal to embrace any totalizing theory was more than likely viewed by Bloch as indecisive at best, intellectually immature at worst. Given Simmel's own position, it becomes clear why he might wish for a space to effectively explore one's intellectual individuality free from censure or condemnation. Given his foresight into future struggles over the "grounds on which authoritative judgements of value can be made," it also becomes clear why he might want to secure an arena where those struggles can take place.[53] In this light, it makes sense that Simmel presented that final caveat to his otherwise negative analysis of the Metropolis. In a strategy that an older Bloch should have recognized and embraced, Simmel wanted to secure a degree of potentiality,

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51. *Ibid.*, p. 157-158.

52. While this is not the place to determine the theoretical impact Nietzsche may have exerted upon Simmel, it should be noted that his subsequent study, *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche: Ein Vortragszyklus* (1907) reflects a broad familiarity with the bulk of Nietzsche's writings. We also know that Simmel delivered lectures on Nietzsche's essay "The Use and Abuse of History for Life" as early as 1904. Nonetheless, the possible links between Nietzsche and Simmel's thought are purely speculative on my part. However, I think it is important to note that Simmel takes the opportunity to explicitly mention Nietzsche *three times* in "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (pp. 47, 51 and 59). Aside from Nietzsche, Simmel mentions only two other individuals by name — each one just once: Goethe and the British art critic and social theorist John Ruskin (1819-1900). It should also be noted that in 1903, relatively few individuals both inside and outside the academy had heard of Nietzsche — much less read any of his books. See Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, tr. by Helmut Loiskandl, Deena Weinstein and Michael A. Weinstein (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) and Deena Weinstein and Michael A. Weinstein, *Postmodern(ized) Simmel* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 171.

53. Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

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possibility and hope in a unique and untested arena.[54]

When assessing Simmel's writings now eighty-seven years after his death, many of his themes can be found in the current academic debates surrounding modernism and post-modernism. Although the market retains its influence upon the Metropolis and its citizens, different degrees of individualism do continue to flourish. In their trenchant analysis and critique of the "culture industry" in the United States, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer articulate the ascension of objective culture to a level that Simmel would probably find more than mildly disturbing.[55] However, given a degree of honest effort, it can be argued that space remains within the Metropolis for the intellectual to explore and develop his or her individuality while still finding opportunities for its expression. It is in this sense, if not in others as well, that Simmel remains our contemporary.

54. I argue that Bloch should have recognized and embraced this aspect of Simmel because a major concern of his own work consisted of holding out hope for the as yet unrealized potentialities and possibilities of the human spirit. One of Bloch's great contributions to Marxist theory challenges the otherwise determinant aspects of Marxism by positing a future that refuses easy prediction. By doing so, Bloch wanted to inspire hope where others had seen only hopelessness. A good discussion of this concept appears in Jack Zipes' introduction to *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), a collection of essays by Bloch.

55. One of the best analyses of the "culture industry" can still be found in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1972), pp. 120-167.

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The Antinomies of Slavoj Zizek

Geoff Boucher

For the last decade, Slavoj Zizek's provocative and insightful interventions have contested the contemporary abandonment of radical politics and the postmodern retreat from the Enlightenment. Rejecting talk of the "victory of liberalism," Zizek calls for a revolutionary analysis of the connection between multinational capitalism and political subjectivity capable of reconstructing the project of global emancipation. In opposition to postmodern relativism, Zizek positions Lacan not as a postmodern theorist but as an Enlightenment thinker. His Lacanian interpretation of ideology proposes that the missing link in post-Althusserian theories is the unconscious subject, as the unruly by-product of ideological interpellation. Zizek combines this reconstructed theory of ideology with Hegelian dialectics, to create a remarkable new social theory that places the universality of the subject at the centre of political ontology, while making strenuous efforts to escape the metaphysical implications of speculative philosophy. Zizek's work is undoubtedly a breakthrough. By developing a political concept of the autonomous subject, he not only supplies a sophisticated extension to the theory of ideological interpellation, but also furnishes an ethical basis for democratic socialism grounded in a structural theory of the subject.[1]

Nonetheless, the conclusions towards which Zizek is driven, apparently on the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis, are nothing less than extraordinary, and tend to undermine any confidence we might have in his complex theory. Zizek's recent espousal of a "politics of Truth," that would subvert contemporary capitalism, just as Christianity undermined the Roman Empire,[2] is part of a package deal. This comes complete with a defense of the excesses of Leninism,[3] a theory of the proletariat as the "singular universal" of capitalist society that is reminiscent of Georg Lukács' notion of the proletariat as the identical subject-object of history,[4] an intellectual return to the speculative heights of Schelling's Romantic

1. A version of this essay will appear as "The Law as a Thing: Zizek and the Graph of Desire," in Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos and Matt Sharpe, eds., *Critical Essays on Slavoj Zizek, with a Reply: Traversing the Fantasy* (London: Ashgate, forthcoming), pp. 25-46.

2. Slavoj Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 211.

3. Slavoj Zizek, "Repeating Lenin," 2001, Available: http://lacan.com/replenin.htm (accessed 3 November, 2003).

4. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, *op. cit.*; Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, tr. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin, 1971).

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philosophy,[5] and a metaphysically well-endowed revival of Pauline theology.[6] In Zizek's "philosophical manifesto of Cartesian subjectivity," *The Ticklish Subject* (2000), we are cheerfully informed by the author that embracing this reinvigorated Cartesianism necessarily leads to ethical decisionism and political voluntarism.[7] These are condensed, for Zizek, into the figure of a "voluntarist decisionism," which is to be combined with "Cartesian mechanism" to produce, in what must rate as an alchemical triumph, a "materialist theory of Grace."[8] Despite my fundamental political solidarity with Zizek's project, I do not believe that such a quasi-religious doctrine of redemption can possibly found an emancipatory politics for the 21st century.

In this paper, I perform a symptomatic analysis of a series of political reversals, ethical hesitations and theoretical uncertainties that betray the existence of a system of antinomies in Zizek's work.[9] This is not the claim that Zizek has changed position – a truly trivial "discovery," since he has openly announced his theoretical shifts in, for instance, the new introduction to *For They Know Not What They Do* (2002) – but that his positions are technical antinomies. According to Kant, antinomies are opposite conclusions reached from identical premises, and they infallibly testify to "transcendental illusion," that is, the application of regulative ideas directly to empirical objects. The idea in question is the death drive (described by Zizek as the Real). In Zizek's case, the form finally taken by transcendental illusion is specific (not to mention, spectacular): he rehabilitates the discredited Romantic doctrine of "intellectual intuition," or productive imagination, where a god-like intellect, or an "identical subject-object" of history, directly constitutes the phenomenal world from its ideas. I begin from an analysis of Zizek's interpretation of psychoanalysis, showing how his treatment of the Lacanian subject results in an antinomic conception of the relation between Symbolic and Real. This condemns Zizek to lurch between these antinomic poles, hesitating between the alternatives of total complicity with "obscene enjoyment" or a catastrophic rupture with existing symbolic structures. Then I investigate the politico-theoretical consequences of this conception and examine the political, ethical and theoretical dilemmas that result. I trace these problems to a speculative conception of the relation between subject and object that relies on the metaphysical doctrine of the "identical subject-object." Finally, I suggest an alternative project, based in Zizek's early work, which avoids these dilemmas.

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5. Slavoj Zizek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London and New York: Verso, 1996).
6. Slavoj Zizek, *On Belief* (London and New York: Verso, 2001).
7. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-15.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-19.
9. For a different conception of Zizek's antinomies, see Matthew Sharpe, *Slavoj Zizek: A Little Piece of the Real* (London: Ashgate, 2004).

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Beyond Interpellation: The Lacanian Interpretation of Althusser

In Chapter Three of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Zizek produces a virtuoso exposition of the Lacanian interpretation of ideological interpellation.[10] According to Althusser, ideological apparatuses function by "interpellating" individuals into socialised subjects, through their ideological "hailing" by the state machinery in the process of education, parliamentary democracy, civic life and so forth.[11] For Althusser, the mystification inherent in ideology springs from an imaginary, egocentric misrecognition of decentred structures, not, as in classical Marxism, from a motivated distortion of economic relations. The problem with Althusser's account was that the process of interpellation appeared to be completely successful – the subjects who were mere "bearers of structures" (in Althusser's phrase) seemed nothing more than mindless drones of the dominant ideology.[12] The postmarxian sequel to Althusser proposed that, under conditions where there were multiple determinations of identity, resistance to interpellation arose because of conflict between the multiple subject-positions occupied by the individual.[13] According to Zizek, however, the dimension "beyond interpellation" that subverts every ideological form of social subjectivity arises not only from conflicts amongst a dispersed multiplicity of subject-positions, but also from the unbridgeable gulf between subjection to the signifier and the materiality of the body.[14] By contrast with post-Althusserian theory, then, Zizek proposes to concentrate not only on the symbolic dispersion of an imaginary unity, but also on the Real subversion of symbolic identification.

Drawing on the Lacanian theory of the subject, Zizek explains the mechanism of ideological interpellation with reference to Lacan's "Graph of Desire."[15] Designed to replace the Freudian topography of the ego, superego and id,[16] Lacan's topology formalizes the fundamental structure of the "subject of the signifier." The Graph represents the imaginary identity and symbolic identifications of the subject, together with the "subversion of the subject" through the logic of unconscious desire, driven by the Real of libidinal investments, or enjoyment. The Graph of Desire can be regarded as consisting of two analytically distinct, but

10. Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), pp. 87-129.

11. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, tr. by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 127-86. For a superb reconstruction of the Althusserian problematic, see Robert Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).

12. Paul Hirst, "Althusser's Theory of Ideology," in *Economy and Society* 5.4 (1976), pp. 385-411.

13. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, tr. by Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London: Verso, 1985).

14. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-129. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, tr. by Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 292-325.

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actually connected levels, which broadly correspond to the distinction between the statement (the Imaginary/Symbolic level) and the enunciation (the Symbolic/Real level).[17] This is recast by Zizek in terms of the illocutionary force (the performative dimension) and the locutionary content (the constative dimension) of that speech act by which a person assumes a social mandate.[18]

The Lacanian interpretation of Althusser therefore involves two significant rectifications to the concept of ideological interpellation.

> Zizek effectively reverses Althusser's formula of the "interpellation of individuals into subjects" to suggest that ideology really interpellates *subjects* into *individuals*. The entry of the infant into culture involves an act of repression that creates the unconscious subject even as this subject is reified, "imprisoned," forced to interact with the world through the agency of the ego. Where the ego belongs to the register of the Imaginary, the subject belongs to the Symbolic. I shall refer to this from now on as the "Imaginary/Symbolic level."

Subjectivation also involves what might be called the interpellation of *human bodies* into *subjects*. When the body is subjected to the Symbolic Order, its linear, instinctual satisfactions are warped into the rotary motion of the drives. The infant's *jouissance* (hereafter, "enjoyment") is mostly evacuated, reduced to the remainders of the erogenous zones.[19] Where the subject belongs to the register of

16. Richard Boothby's *Death and Desire* provides a useful first approximation to the relation between the Freudian subject and the Lacanian subject, one that allows us to provisionally map Lacan's often arcane topological "registers" (the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real) onto the more familiar psychic agencies of the Freudian topography of the psyche. The Freudian agencies of the ego, the superego and the id map onto the Lacanian registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real, respectively. See Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 106, 72-74.

17. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, tr. by Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 138-39.

18. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 113; Slavoj Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 69-110.

19. My understanding of Lacanian psychoanalysis is strongly influenced by Bruce Fink's lucid expositions. See especially Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). Both Fink and Zizek translate Lacan's term, "*jouissance*," as "enjoyment." Enjoyment signifies something at once exciting and unpleasant, and can be defined (following Freud) as horror, generated by a pleasure of which we were unaware. Consult Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

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the Symbolic, then, the drives (and the enjoyment they afford) belong to the register of the Real. I shall refer to this from now on as the "Symbolic/Real level."

The basis for Zizek's insight is the psychoanalytic theory that the human being is both "divided" (between consciousness and the unconscious), or "lacking," and "decentred" (because human desire is not autonomous, but depends upon the Other), or characterised by "loss." These terms – division, or "lack," and decentring, or "loss" – recapitulate the two levels that I have introduced. Division refers to the Imaginary/Symbolic level and decentring designates the Symbolic/Real level. The critical thing is that just as the Imaginary/Symbolic level of the statement is fundamentally incomplete (because the imaginary unity of the individual is undermined by the lack of a final signifier), the Symbolic/Real level of the enunciation is internally inconsistent (because the discourse of the subject indicates a prohibited object beyond the field of signification).

In Freud's analysis of Dora, for instance, the young woman believes that she is a fully conscious individual and denies any unconscious desires exist.[20] She therefore cannot explain what the possible relation might be between Herr K's sexual advances and her nervous cough and loss of voice. She complains that she is being reduced to an object in an intersubjective network of exchanges. She is, she believes, to be offered by her father to Herr K in exchange for his unimpeded access to Frau K. Freud's analysis reveals that Dora's symptoms evidence an ambivalent relation to the entire situation, however, one in which her unconscious desire for her father, ambiguously transferred onto Herr K, is in conflict with her conscious rejection of Herr K's advances. Dora's statements are therefore inconsistent, subverted, and this situation, where the unconscious makes itself known only through small, "irrational" symptoms, is known as the "division of the subject." Division happens at the Imaginary/Symbolic level of the statement: the (symbolically generated) unconscious desires of the subject are in conflict with the conscious statements of the ego. But for Dora there is another surprise in store. The network of exchanges that she decries depends upon her active assumption of the role of victim, suggesting that, at the level of the enunciation, she obtains a certain libidinal satisfaction from the arrangement. The father's desire is critical here: what Dora (unconsciously) desires is to be desired by the father. Insofar as her hysterical symptoms maintain the intersubjective network in a precarious balance where her father is constantly demonstrating his love for her, she successfully obtains what she wants without transgressing the incest taboo. This implies that the desire of the subject is "decentred," constituted in relation to the Other and riven by the contradictory imperatives of obtaining (potentially incestuous) satisfaction and acceding to the Symbolic Law (the incest prohibition). The Symbolic/Real level of the enunciation, then, refers to the subversion of the desire of the subject by the strange, circular logic of the

20. Sigmund Freud, *Case Histories I: "Dora" and "Little Hans,"* tr. by James Strachey, ed. by Angela Richards, vol. 8 (London and New York: Penguin, 1981), pp. 31-164.

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drives, according to which missing the object is the very aim of the exercise.

Indeed, according to psychoanalysis, the drives are themselves "decentred." In unconscious thought, the subject constructs fantasies, which bring it into contact with "object-causes of desire." But these objects are known in psychoanalysis as "partial objects" – Lacan specifies a list that includes breast, faeces, gaze, phallus and voice[21] – and there is no "ultimate object" that brings all of these partial objects together. The unconscious is therefore "decentred": a "montage" of competing drives,[22] the unconscious has suffered, from the moment of its inception, the loss of that object (the "maternal Thing") that would reassemble this pulsing plurality into a unified and harmonious "body and soul." It follows that reference to the "death drive" as the "Real of enjoyment" must be understood as a merely regulative totalisation of these heterogeneous drives.

Symbolic Law versus Superego Enjoyment

These reflections on the anti-Cartesian thrust of psychoanalysis by no means align Lacan with the poststructuralist "death of the subject". The "subject" of postmodern theory is really a swarm, trivially held together by the contingent fact that this dispersed multiplicity of subject-positions happens to inhabit a single body. By contrast, the Lacanian subject, despite its only fleeting existence at the level of the enunciation, *does* possess the minimal consistency necessary to describe it *as a subject*. In the first instance, the subject – the enunciative "I" – exists as a transcendental locus, as a "void in the symbolic chain" where something might come to be. But this subject, denoted graphically as *$*, the "barred" subject, in representing itself in discourse by adopting a "proper" name, merely absents itself through this very act of representation (hence its "fading" character). In the second place, however, what comes to be in this place is a distinct (but unconscious) style of the subject, based on the "fundamental fantasy". By means of the "proper" name of the subject (for instance, the paternal surname), the subject articulates a demand in language, indicating thereby, in the sequence of their objects, an impossible desire that lies beyond the symbolic field. This contingent thing is nothing less than a "missing part" of the subject, a "lost object" that the divided subject desperately seeks, the *objet petit a*, designated graphically as (*a*). I imagine the style of the subject as a tragic little personal ad that every person stubbornly, repetitively places in the local paper of his or her biography: "divided subject desperately seeks lost object..." But because this object is radically decentred, dependent on the desire of the Other, the divided subject is only reunited with the object (*a*) in the imaginary scenario of the fundamental fantasy,

21. Lacan, *Ecrits*, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

22. Maire Jaanus, "The *Démontage* of the Drive," in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, eds. Bruce Fink, Richard Feldstein and Maire Jaanus (New York: SUNY Press, 1995).

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denoted as ($ _ a).[23]

Now we are in a position to grasp the significance of a tiny, but crucial, detail in Zizek's discussion. As we have seen, the opposition between the Symbolic Law and the Real of enjoyment is a decentring *within* one level of the subject and not an opposition between the two levels. But curiously, Zizek has a different explanation: he describes the two levels of the subject as "the level of [Symbolic] meaning and the level of [Real] enjoyment".[24] Indeed, Zizek tends to present the distinction between Symbolic Law and the Real of enjoyment as coextensive with the opposition between ideological meaning (the level of the statement) and superego enjoyment (the level of the enunciation). That is to say, for Zizek, statement and enunciation correspond to the distinction between Symbolic and Real. He creates a series of equivalences, which result from projecting the distinction between ideological meaning (Symbolic) and unconscious enjoyment (Real), lower level and upper level of the Graph of Desire, onto all of his case studies. These include: "enlightened cynicism" (Symbolic) and "ideological enjoyment" (Real);[25] "cynical distance" (Symbolic) and "ethnic nationalism" (Real);[26] "democratic politics" (Symbolic) and "bureaucratic enjoyment" (Real);[27] and, the "official public law" (Symbolic) and its "supplementary framework of illegal transgressions" (Real).[28]

Zizek's move has very serious implications. Because Zizek systematically maps this distinction onto his case studies, the division between symbolic field and real enjoyment is paradigmatic for what I describe as the "antinomies of Zizek". Paradigmatically, then, this distinction takes the form of the opposition between "symbolic public Law" (Symbolic) and the "superego transgressions" (Real) that support the Law.[29]

In so far as superego designates the intrusion of enjoyment into the field of ideology, we can also say that the opposition of symbolic Law and superego points towards the tension between ideological meaning and enjoyment: Symbolic Law guarantees meaning, whereas superego provides enjoyment which serves as the unacknowledged support of meaning.[30]

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23. Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimité," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse*, eds. Mark Bracher, Marshall Alcorn, Ronald Corthell and Françoise Massardier-Kenney (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994).
24. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-33.
26. Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), pp. 200-16.
27. Slavoj Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 231-52.
28. Slavoj Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 54-85.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

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That is, Zizek explicitly aligns the lower level of the Graph ("the level of meaning") with the Symbolic and the upper level of the Graph ("the level of enjoyment") with the Real of the superego. Implied in Zizek's conception of the relation between superego enjoyment (the enunciation) and ideological meaning (the statement) is the phenomenalisation of the unconscious Symbolic Law (its replacement by the master signifier), and the conflation of primary and secondary identifications. It is on this basis that he claims to theorise the "predominance of the superego over the law":[31] superego emerges where the Law – the public Law, the Law articulated in the public discourse – fails; at this point of failure, the public Law is compelled to search for support in an *illegal* enjoyment. Superego is the obscene "nightly" law that necessarily redoubles and accompanies, as its shadow, the "public" Law.[32]

Zizek's condensation – "public Law," as a collapse of Symbolic Law into public legality – indicates exactly the conflation at work in his fundamental insight. The collapse of the Imaginary/Symbolic and Symbolic/Real levels onto an opposition between a Symbolic and a Real level presents the unconscious as unified and centred, consisting solely of a "Real kernel" of enjoyment structured by fantasy. Zizek does not accept that this is an accurate representation of his position. He claims that the Symbolic Law solicits the Real of superego enjoyment, which acts to support/subvert it.[33] Although this seems similar to what I have described as the Symbolic/Real level of the subject, it is actually a restatement of Zizek's conception of an opposition between the symbolic statement and the Real of the enunciation. According to Zizek, in filling out the contents of the universal, the master signifier necessarily stages a sequence of exclusions, which, instead of undermining the reigning ideology and/or legal framework, actually support it and legitimate forms of extra-legal coercion.[34] The problem is that Zizek identifies these "inherent transgressions" of public legality with the enunciation, when they are actually a supplement to the statement of public legality. At the same time, he is compelled to present the strictly unconscious Symbolic Law as somehow "articulated in the public discourse."

In theoretical terms, the Symbolic Law is an unconscious, empty enunciation, a "No!" that, like the Kantian categorical imperative, lacks all determinate content. But this prohibition can only be conveyed by a statement (the Lacanian "Name-of-the-Father"), that, in its very determinacy, necessarily falls short of a full universality and therefore requires supplementation through a statement of its

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31. Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, p. 241.

32. Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, p. 54.

33. See Slavoj Zizek, "*Concesso non Dato*," in Geoff Boucher *et al.*, *Critical Essays on Slavoj Zizek*, *op. cit.*, p. 227. But this denial lacks force, because it remains a mere counter-assertion, and not a theoretical demonstration.

34. Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

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exceptions/transgressions. This situation is structurally homologous to the relationship between the Kantian Moral Law and its statement in public legality and/or a moral maxim: the moral act is always flawed, not because its maxim lacks universality, but because some residual "pathological" interest of the subject motivates its execution. But to collapse the Moral Law onto public legality and then claim that the pathological interests of the subject are the active support of "Moral legality" would be to deprive the subject of any possibility for resisting injustice. It is precisely the gap between the Moral Law and every legal code that makes it possible for the subject to adopt a critical position towards authority. The implications of Zizek's position become clear when we consider his claim that the division of the Law into "Symbolic public Law" and an obscene superego supplement is a consequence of modernity, where the advent of a neutral-universal law implies the repression of the "authoritarian-patriarchal logic that continues to determine our attitudes."[35] In other words, the "predominance" of the superego implies that every moral universal and political reform is only a screen for its opposite – the racist, sexist, nationalist, etc., enjoyment that, centred and unified in the unconscious, constitutes the real subject of modernity.

These reflections bring us to the antinomy governing Zizek's theory. The antinomy goes like this: on the one hand, the Real is only the "inherent transgression" of the Symbolic, and so we should cleave to the symbolic field (Zizek often enjoins us to "stick to the letter of the law"), by rejecting the allure of superego enjoyment. On the other hand, however, the symbolic field is nothing but a ruse, secretly supported by an obscene enjoyment that in actuality reigns supreme. This makes a "non-universalisable enjoyment" dominant with respect to the Symbolic Law, so that the only effective resistance to power is a complete exit from the existing field of universality. Zizek's vision of modernity is relatively grim, then, and certainly lends little credibility to his claim to defend the Enlightenment from the depredations of postmodern skepticism.[36] To the contrary: Zizek reads like a late Romantic denunciation of modernity.[37] The Zizekian subject resembles a "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" monster: at the level of the statement, a defender of rational universality, but beneath this veneer, at the level of the enunciation, a secret devotee of obscene nationalism, vicious anti-Semitism and/or patriarchal sexism. Because of the way Zizek has structured this opposition, there is no way to get beyond the oscillation between the symbolic field and an obscene enjoyment, except by dispensing completely with the divided subject.

Political Impasse

Zizek is on the horns of a dilemma. The supremacy of unconscious enjoyment

35. *Ibid.*, p. 56 emphasis added.
36. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
37. Justin Clemens has elaborated this point in detail in *The Romanticism of Contemporary Theory* (London: Ashgate, 2003).

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– for instance, the secret dependence of democratic politics on nationalist enjoyment – dictates a politics torn between the alternatives of total capitulation or catastrophic rupture. On the one hand, democratic politics, discursive universality, public legality, and so forth, are all lent their "ontological consistency" by the hidden ballast of a repressed "ethico-political Act" of social inauguration.[38] Discursive formations are therefore relatively stable, because they are supported by a kernel of enjoyment, structured by an unconscious fantasy, which Zizek connects with the repressed "political Act"/"national Thing"/"the Political". On the other hand, the Political/Act/Thing, the "kernel of the Real," has exclusively sinister connotations, because Zizek aligns it with bureaucratic idiocy, illegal transgressions, racist enjoyment, patriarchal sexism, and so forth. The ballast of democratic politics therefore turns out to be the dead weight of nationalist enjoyment, and so-called "ethnic cleansing" is revealed as the "repressed truth" of liberal democracy.[39]

Grasping the democratic horn of the dilemma, it seemed at first that Zizek would opt for a politics of "enthusiastic resignation" to democratic invention,[40] accompanied by the ethical strategy of "maintaining the gap" between politics and "the Political."[41] Renouncing the lethal fascination with gestures of political institution, supposedly characteristic of, for instance, classical Marxism, post-marxism would remain on the field of hegemonic struggles marked out by the boundaries of liberal democracy and the nation state.[42] Beginning from such assumptions, however, it is equally elementary for Zizek to deduce that multicultural tolerance, political liberties, struggles for cultural recognition and even radical social reforms are all secretly supported by the unconscious enjoyment gained from compliance in deed (if not in words) with nationalistic rituals. Even radical reforms, in other words, are nothing but the "human face" of the obscene enjoyment generated by the capitalism-nationalism nexus.[43] Instead of conceptualising the political field as struggles for hegemony, traversed by a shifting balance of forces (within which, reforms represent concessions, not tricks), Zizek describes politics in terms reminiscent of base-and-superstructure reductionism.

Zizek's dilemma generates a zig-zag in his politics. While many indices of Zizek's transformation from radical democrat to hyper-Marxist exist – the Leninist party (from fetish to analyst);[44] Stalinism (from perversion-instrumentalisation

38. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-91.
39. Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
40. Slavoj Zizek, "Beyond Discourse Analysis," in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, ed. by Ernesto Laclau (London and New York: Verso, 1990), p. 259.
41. Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, *op. cit.*
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 271-73.
43. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, *op. cit.*, p. 205.
44. Slavoj Zizek, "The Fetish of the Party," in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, eds. Richard Feldstein and Willy Apollon (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995). Compare this with the following: Zizek, "Repeating Lenin," *op. cit.*

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to tragic instrument of historical progress);[45] Lenin (from Jacobin terrorist to decisionist "Master")[46] – the role of the Jacobin regicide is exemplary. This is because the "Jacobin paradox" – the problem of how to hold open the "empty place of power" in societies characterised by democratic invention, without inadvertently occupying (and thus, filling) this locus – is the conundrum of modern politics. As Zizek shifts from democratic politics to a direct assault on the "kernel of the Real," the Jacobin regicide travels the distance from being denounced as an "empty acting out,"[47] to its dramatic endorsement as a radical decision, expressing absolute freedom.[48]

For Zizek, only the "authentic Act" disturbs the reigning symbolic fiction and discloses the kernel of the Real.[49] As Zizek explains, the archetypal Act is a political revolution.[50] Yet, it follows from Zizek's construction of the opposition between Symbolic and Real that this must happen "in the Real," through the unilateral declaration of a new social order. The consequences of conceptualising the distinction between hegemonic politics and the Act of institution of the "Political Thing" on these lines are relatively alarming – Zizek's exemplars, for instance, are increasingly drawn from fantasy and terrorism – and generate a constant vacillation between democratic politics and quasi-religious militarism. But even supposing that such a judgement were valid, how on earth would such a leap "into the Real" be accomplished?

Zizek defends his stance by means of the distinction between "acting out" and the "passage à l'acte," or Act. While "acting out is still a symbolic act ... addressed to the big Other ... a 'passage to the act' suspends the dimension of the big Other, as the act is transposed into the dimension of the Real".[51] This distinction valorises what for many analysts indicates catastrophe, and neglects Lacan's distinction between "acting out" as impotent protest and the performative legitimacy of the symbolic act. For Zizek, quite explicitly, "the 'passage to the act' entails ... an exit from the symbolic network, a dissolution of the social bond."[52] Not surprisingly, as this aspect of Zizek's theory becomes central, the rhetoric of a "suicidal" and "psychotic"[53] Act increases in stridency.[54]

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45. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-45; Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-73; Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, *op. cit.*, pp. 194, 379.
46. Slavoj Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute — or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London and New York: Verso, 2000).
47. Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, *op. cit.*, p. 256.
48. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, *op. cit.*, p. 192.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 369-92.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
51. Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
54. Zizek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-39. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, *op. cit.*, pp. 374-81. Slavoj Zizek, "Georg Lukács as the Philosopher of Leninism," *A Defense of History and Class Consciousness*, ed. by Georg Lukács (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 151-56.

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Grasping the "political Act" horn of the dilemma, then, leads Zizek towards ambiguous references to the Khmer Rouge and Shining Path,[55] coupled with the adoption of a Year-Zero-style rhetoric,[56] culminating in the advocacy of a militaristic, quasi-religious community, "beyond democracy." Zizek's position is perilously close to an ultra-left refusal of the difference between capitalist democracy and military dictatorship, redolent of the politics of Third Period Stalinism. Is it necessary to add that this dichotomy – liberal parliamentarism or revolutionary totalitarianism – accepts, in advance, the legitimacy of the antagonist's construal of the political field?

Despite the elaborate conceptual apparatus that makes such deductions possible, Zizek's programmatic contributions display a certain "poverty of philosophy." If the Thing supports democracy, then to destroy the Thing, we have to destroy democracy, and replace it with a soviet republic. This not only restricts democracy to the most limited forms of parliamentary liberalism, but it also appears to completely ignore the entire history of twentieth-century socialist politics. Beginning with Antonio Gramsci, the Marxist movement tried to develop a strategy capable of negotiating the crucial difference between Russia and the West, namely, the centrality of parliamentary democracy and the institutions of civil society to the greater stability of the imperialist countries. In this light, Zizek is surprisingly indifferent to theories of alternative democratic forms,[57] or indeed, to any recent theorisation of the institutional forms of popular sovereignty.[58] Zizek's political impasse springs from the opposition between the democratic universal and nationalist fantasy, leading to an oscillation between an "enthusiastic resignation" that smacks of cynical acceptance, and an ultra-left, voluntarist refusal of democratic politics. Hence the exemplary status of his otherwise unintelligible references to the Hegelian Monarch and the Hegelian "ethical" (sometimes, "religious") community that pepper Zizek's work. The Hegelian Monarch is the "democratic" solution to the Jacobin problem, that is, a form of plebiscitory presidential Bonapartism designed to protect democratic forms, while the "religious community" is the Hegelian organic totality beyond the nation-state (and therefore also beyond democracy). I accept that this antinomy – a modern structural antinomy between constitutional and insurrectionary politics – inhabits the object of analysis. But the point is that this is uncritically transposed into the theory rather than dialectically integrated, allowing the oscillation between the advocacy of presidential Bonapartism and a religious commune to

55. Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-25.
56. Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
57. See, for instance, C. B. MacPherson, "Post-Liberal Democracy," *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), and *The Real World of Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).
58. See, for instance, Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, tr. by Patrick Camiller (London: New Left Books, 1978).

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determine the compass of Zizek's politics.

Ethical Hesitations

Zizek's political vacillation is repeated on ethical terrain, as the hesitation between an ethics of desire, linked to the prohibition on disturbing the Thing, and the plunge into the "suicidal act," figured as an ethics of the Real. According to Zizek, the ethics of desire characterises the political field in terms of the radically ambiguous relationship of the people to the national Thing, the kernel of the Real around which the life of the community revolves.[59] The utopian fantasy of the content of the Thing – the harmonious society beloved of totalitarian ideology – is resisted by the ethics of desire, which really means the maintenance of desire in dis-satisfaction. Maintaining this gap avoids the "danger of yielding to fascination with the Thing, and being drawn into its lethal vortex, which can only end in psychosis or suicidal passage à l'acte."[60] By implication a Kantian ethics – involving the renunciation of the content of the Supreme Good for an ethics of universal duty – the "ethics of desire" promotes an ethical variant of the politics of "enthusiastic resignation" that we have just examined. But, asks Zizek, "how can we avoid recognising a reference to the contemporary political landscape, with its two extremes of unprincipled liberal pragmatism and fundamentalist fanaticism?"[61] Thus, for Zizek, the only alternatives opened by modernity are political liberalism and its "inherent transgressions," ethnic nationalism, religious fundamentalism and so forth. In his recent statement of an ethics "beyond the Good," Zizek asks: Is not Lacan's entire theoretical edifice torn between . . . two options: between the ethics of desire/Law, of maintaining the gap, and the lethal/suicidal immersion in the Thing?[62]

Whatever the case with Lacan, this certainly identifies the internal fissure in Zizek's work. When it comes to the decision, however, Zizek is for the "lethal/suicidal immersion in the Thing." Zizek's exploration of this lethal plunge – the ethical correlative to the political Act – happens through the trope of "diabolical evil."[63] For Kant, evil exists as radical evil, which designates not a special class of actions, but the root of the human condition in what we might call "pathological narcissism," that is, making the performance of ethical duty conditional upon some narcissistic satisfaction.[64] Kant rules out the human commission of acts of "angelic good" or "diabolical evil" for the straightforward reason that in "diabolical evil," the noumenal Moral Law becomes phenomenalised as an empirical

59. Slavoj Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), pp. 213-41.
60. Zizek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
62. Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, *op. cit.*, p. 239.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-41.
64. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 25.

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action.[65] In his recent insistence that diabolical evil and the supreme good are formally identical[66] – because they represent the moment of ethico-political institution – Zizek perhaps hopes to aim, not for the inherent transgressions of an ethico-political field, but for its "foreclosed" "kernel of the Real".

The starting point for this new ethics, however, is nothing less than the Kierkegaardian trope of a "religious suspension of the ethical,"[67] which Zizek also figures as a "Leftist suspension of the Law."[68] For Zizek, the consequences of his reconceptualisation of the ethics of the Real are enormous: it "delivers us from guilt" and abolishes the objectivity of the distinction between Good and Evil.[69] Implied in Zizek's conception of the ethical act – apart from its explicit moral relativism – are several consequences: the direct intrusion of the Symbolic Law into consciousness; the direct intervention of the noumenal realm into the phenomenal domain, and; the obliteration of subjective division in the "act of an undivided subject."[70] These conditions equal an identical subject-object – in other words, an unreconstructed Cartesianism. This position makes sense only if we accept Zizek's assumptions: if discursive universality (and therefore everyday morality) is secretly supported by some venal enjoyment, then the only way to really defeat this racist/sexist/nationalist/etc. enjoyment is to jump clear from the existing field of ethico-political universality altogether, in an ethico-politico-metaphysical "Great Leap Forward." Not surprisingly, then, this road travels by way of the adoption of a curious rhetorical combination of messianic religious motifs and slogans reminiscent of Cultural-Revolution-period Maoism. Hence, we have the proletarian chiliasm of "Pauline materialism" and the injunction to "repeat Lenin,"[71] the advocacy of the "gesture of the authentic master," the "irrational violence" that founds a new, spiritual community through a "supreme crime,"[72] and so forth.

Theoretical Uncertainty

Before following Zizek into the "abyss of freedom," where he will rehabilitate the doctrine of the identical subject-object, we have to observe the fall of the last barrier to high metaphysics, namely, the collapse of the Lacanian relation of "aphanisis," or inverse proportionality, between subject and object. For Zizek,

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65. Joan Copjec, "Evil in the Time of the Finite World," *Radical Evil*, ed. by Joan Copjec (London and New York: Verso, 1996), xvi-xx.
66. Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-41.
67. Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
68. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, *op. cit.*, p. 223.
69. Zizek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
70. There are some signs that Zizek has begun to retreat from the pseudo-problem of "diabolical evil," without, however, retracting the identical subject-object that is its correlate. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, *op. cit.*, p. 382. Zizek, *On Belief*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
71. Zizek, "Repeating Lenin."
72. Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute*, *op. cit.*

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the "ultimate speculative identity" (of subject and object) happens when the "authentic Act" of the subject suspends the existing Symbolic Order (coextensive with the social field, for Zizek) only to inaugurate a new "big Other."[73] This is a metaphysical exploration of the problematic of the "Great Leap Forward" that we have already seen is the root of Zizek's political zig-zags and ethical hesitations. Zizek's speculative philosophy involves a chain of equivalences: first, the speculative identity of the object (a) with the Symbolic Order;[74] then, the speculative identity of the subject with the Symbolic Order. The clear implication is that in the Act, the subject and object are "speculatively" identical. Yet, this is "perhaps the hardest speculative nut to crack" for Zizek, and so he can only indicate that the Lacanian motif of creation ex nihilo means that:

> *Although one has to be careful not to confound the Act qua* Real with the performative gesture of the Master-Signifier, the two are nonetheless closely connected: the ultimate paradox of the process of signification, its "highest mystery," is the fact that the Act *qua* Real . . . is simultaneously the "vanishing mediator" that *founds* the Symbolic Order. . . . In short, the Act *qua* Real and the Master-Signifier are not "substantially" different.[75]

In other words, the historical subject, via the "highest mystery" of the transubstantiation of the death drive, creates the totality of the Symbolic Order (social field). The "ultimate paradox" of Zizek's theory is an identical subject-object, a world-constituting, self-identical, punctual unity.

Formally speaking, Zizek is able to prevent the emergence of an identical subject-object by proposing that the divided subject ($) is in a relation of inverse proportionality with its lost object (*a*), so that the approach of the object (*a*) means aphanisis (fading) of the subject, $. The only "identical subject-object" in Lacanian theory is the fantasy relation, symbolised as ($_*a*), where the "losange," _, designates a relation of "internal exclusion" or "extimacy" between $ and (*a*). So long as Zizek sticks to the Lacanian orthodoxy, then, he is quite immune to any allegation that he restores an identical subject-object.

Zizek, as we have just seen, exhibits a certain resistance to the consequences of crushing Lacanian theory in the speculative nutcracker. Nonetheless, the conclusion that Zizek is forced towards is that: The act . . . designates the level at which the fundamental divisions and displacements usually associated with the "Lacanian subject" . . . are momentarily suspended.[76]

The "exceptional" situation of an undivided subject, or identical subject-

73. Zizek, *The Indivisible Remainder, op. cit.*, p. 144.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-47.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-47.
76. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject, op. cit.*, pp. 374-75, emphasis added.

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object, of course, founds Zizek's programme. Correlatively, this brings Zizek to formalise the unified unconscious that has so far been only latent in his work: "*the Law itself is a Thing*," he claims[77] – in other words, the incest prohibition and incestuous enjoyment are somehow the same. That such a theory leads to "transcendental illusion," the notion that the Ideal directly constitutes phenomenal reality, is directly implied by Zizek's conclusions. For Kant, were the noumenal to intrude directly into the phenomenal world, humanity would become mere puppets of the Divine Will and not autonomous subjects. Likewise, for Zizek, "the highest freedom coincides with ... a reduction to a lifeless automaton who blindly performs its gestures."[78] Zizek reinvents the doctrine of the identical subject-object by means of the claim that the punctual unity of the unconscious will is capable of unilaterally inaugurating a new social order.

Pauline Materialism?

Zizek's effort to create an emancipatory politics capable of breaking through the contemporary pseudo-dialectic of cynicism and violence leads him to declare himself a "Pauline materialist," or ethical Marxist. Rejecting cynical resignation on the contemporary Left, Zizek makes a series of important interventions, which aim at a dialectical reversal of perspective, from hegemonic politics to the historical frame of "democratic invention" that sustains today's radical democratic theory.[79] This is Zizek at his best, placing class struggle back on the theoretical agenda, and perhaps indicating a welcome shift away from messianic appeals to the (highly undialectical) notion of a catastrophic "Truth-Event," predicated on a metaphysical Cartesianism. Indeed, Zizek's endorsement of an identical subject-object always seemed a surprisingly inconsistent position, considering that it was Zizek who proposed to replace dialectics as pre-critical metaphysics – the slide into transcendental illusion – with a Lacanian, post-critical dialectics.[80] "Saving" Hegel through Lacan meant not only repudiating teleology, but also rejecting the mirage of the noumenal thing-in-itself – instead of a dialectics "in the Real," Zizek proposed a Hegelian logic of the signifier.[81] Such logic is entirely opposed to the metaphysics of the identical subject-object, leading to the conclusion that Zizek's "Pauline materialism" represents regression from Lacanian dialectics to pre-critical metaphysics.

The concept of the unconscious subject as the "absent centre of political ontology" advanced in *The Ticklish Subject* makes a lot of sense: central, as a

77. Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, *op. cit.*, p. 236.
78. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, *op. cit.*, p. 375.
79. Slavoj Zizek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, eds. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek (London and New York: Verso, 2000); Slavoj Zizek, "*Da Capo Senza Fine*," in *ibid.*; Slavoj Zizek, "Holding the Place," in *ibid.*
80. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-05.
81. Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, *op. cit.*

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universal, but constitutively absent because constituted in another scene, that of ideology, the subject is the lynchpin of political resistance and the basis for an ethical conception of socialism. The problem lies in the execution, where "in a typical Zizekian inversion, the spectral Cartesian ego is reborn, but this time as its exact opposite, the id."[82] To be precise, Zizek reconceptualises the id so as to attribute to it exactly the same properties (punctual unity, world-constituting agency) formerly assigned to the Cartesian "unified ego," the original "identical subject-object" in modern philosophy.

But – it might be objected – have I somehow overlooked Lacan's return to the subject of the *cogito* in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*?[83] That the unconscious is the subject of the cogito does not mean, however, that the unconscious is the transparent subject who can say, "I think therefore I am". For Lacan, "*cogito ergo sum,"* the identity of thinking and being, remains a fantasy, based on the ultimate "lost object," the substantive omniscient witness (God).[84] I think that retaining Lacan's insight into the cogito as a disjunctive syllogism – "where I am, I am not thinking, and where I am thinking, I am not" – is the key to the Lacanian subject. According to Mladen Dolar's gloss on Lacan's position, "what eventually remains is a pure vanishing point without a counterpart, which can only be sustained in a minimal gesture of enunciation," which he restates as "I enounce, ergo sum."[85] What is at stake, then, in Lacan's apparently paradoxical return to the cogito is the effort to combine the analysis of the subject of the signifier with the beginning of a history of desire. The subject is not only the subject absent from the signifier (an atemporal hypothesis that makes the unconscious the result of any language), but the subject shorn of traditional substance (a distinctly modern subject). "What remains is purely an empty spot occupied by the subject of enunciation. For being empty, it can be universal . . . a merely formal subjectivity purified of all content and substance".[86] The cogito is then a "non-place, a gap, a chasm in the chain of being" – the "non-imaginary subject as void."[87] For Lacan, the mistake in the punctual subject of rational certainty "discovered" by Descartes is that the Cartesian subject is actually a moment of fading present only in the enunciation, which does not subsist thanks to God, but vanishes in the utterance. Zizek's version of the Cartesian subject, by contrast, with its elimination of division and decentring, implies an identity of thinking and being, a re-substantivised cogito.

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82. Terry Eagleton, "Enjoy!," *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* 24.2 (Special Issue on Slavoj Zizek) (2001), p. 50.

83. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 224-25.

85. Mladen Dolar, "Cogito as the Subject of the Unconscious," *Cogito and the Unconscious*, ed. Slavoj Zizek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 15.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

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Based on his conceptualisation of the "Lacanian Thing" as secretly identical to the Cartesian ego, then, Zizek can only lurch between the poles of an antinomy. For the postmarxian Zizek of the radical democratic period, the death drive (the Thing) represents the dimension of radical negativity that cannot be reduced to an expression of alienated social conditions. Therefore: it is not only that the aim is no longer to abolish this antagonism, but that the aspiration to abolish it is precisely the source of totalitarian temptation; the greatest mass murders and holocausts have always been perpetrated in the name of man as a harmonious being, of a New Man without antagonistic tension.[88]

Indeed, this fantasy of the absolute crime that opens a *New Beginning* is sadistic. It is the fantasy that "it is possible to create new forms of life ex nihilo, from the zero-point." From the vantage of Zizek's radical democratic period, it is "not difficult to see how all radical revolutionary projects, Khmer Rouge included, rely on this same fantasy of . . . the creation *ex nihilo* of a new (sublime) Man, delivered from the corruptions of previous history."[89]

But, on the other hand, prohibition eroticises, and so there's an irresistible fascination in the "lethal/suicidal immersion in the Thing" and "creation *ex nihilo*" – at least for the hyper-Marxist Zizek of the period of "Pauline Materialism". Hence, in the "unplugging" from the New World Order by the "authentic psychoanalytic and revolutionary political collectives" that Zizek now urges,[90] "there is a terrifying violence at work in this 'uncoupling,' that of the death drive, of the radical 'wiping the slate clean' as the condition of the *New Beginning*."[91] This sort of "Year Zero" rhetoric may be meant as a provocation to the relativists, as a gesture of defiance towards the contemporary prohibition on thinking about revolution.[92] Nonetheless, I suggest that this combination, of Leninist voluntarism and "irrational" Pauline materialism, does not resist the postmodern couplet of cynical distance and irrational fundamentalism, but repeats its terms.

Two Tactics of Democratic Socialism

Zizek's unreconstructed Cartesianism, with its strained invocation of a foundational socio-political act, is unnecessary. All of the theoretical resources for a radical politics exist in Zizek's work – but only once we dispense with the postulate of a unified subject. To demonstrate this, I shall explain how the two levels of the subject (Imaginary/Symbolic and Symbolic/Real) work in the theory of ideology. Then I will show how each corresponds to a specific political "tactic," based on Zizek's proposals. This will involve discarding a third tactic that is connected

88. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
89. Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, *op. cit.*, p. 261.
90. Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute*, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
92. Slavoj Zizek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? On the Abuses of a Term* (London and New York: Verso, 2001).

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to his endorsement of a unitary unconscious.

The Imaginary/Symbolic level. In ideology, subjects are ascribed political identities as individuals-citizens, wherein they "recognise" their material interests through their membership of particular groups (classes, genders, races, parties and so forth). But such imaginary identities can only become the site for political demands insofar as particular interests are articulated to political universals (human rights, individual liberty, social equality, and so forth). These symbolically-articulated political universals act as "master signifiers," providing at once the means for the unification of a series of particular demands and the locus for the identification of the subject. According to the psychoanalytically-influenced theory of ideology worked out by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, the dialectic of universal and particular instigates a radical lack of fixity in ideological identity, because every new articulation of particular and universal will transform the identity of the individual.[93] Indeed, the subject lacks a definitive political universal, a "proper" signifier that would finally identify it in political space, and so new identifications by the subject constantly undermine any fixed, imaginary individuality. The Imaginary/Symbolic statement of the political subject is therefore characterised by a contradiction between imaginary misrecognition and symbolic articulation.

The Symbolic/Real level. The keys to grasping the Symbolic/Real level of the enunciation are Claude Lefort's thesis on democratic invention[94] and Etienne Balibar's concept of *égaliberté*.[95] On the symbolic side, Lefort's description of democratic politics in terms of the evacuation of the symbolic locus of authority – the thesis that every political party only temporarily and contingently occupies an empty, universal "place of power" – might be described as a "democratic injunction," structurally homologous to the Kantian "categorical imperative". This symbolic injunction against any particular group claiming to incarnate the universal is anti-Jacobin in its implications. On the other side, Balibar's theory of égaliberté, as an unconditional demand that is the presupposition of democratic universality, an impossible drive towards egalitarian liberation that exceeds every concrete demand, announces the dimension of the Real in politics.[96] As a demand with Jacobin implications, a drive beyond thelimits of democracy in the name of universal rights, the dimension of égaliberté is in contradiction with the democratic injunction against the incarnation of universality. The fantasy reconciles the democratic injunction and the unconditional demand for égaliberté in a utopian vision of social harmony. In the nationalist fantasy, as Zizek explains in

93. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, op. cit.*, pp. 93-193.

94. Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

95. Étienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 213, 47.

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Tarrying with the Negative, the antagonism inherent to political community is transposed onto an external opposition between the "us" and "them."[97] What Zizek tends to overlook, however, is the radical ambiguity of the relations between prohibition, drive and fantasy.[98] I propose to interpret the nationalist fantasy as a labile balancing act between the Symbolic and Real aspects of political subjectivity, a pseudo-synthesis and not a unitary "kernel of the Real."

As a result, the ideological struggle to hegemonise the content of the universal is marked by a symptomatic performative contradiction, between a neutral-universal political statement and its partisan position of enunciation by members of political communities sustained by exclusions. In this light, Zizek develops what might be called the "two tactics of democratic socialism in the radical democratic movement". These tactics are, as Zizek explains, the interpretation of symptoms and the traversal of the fantasy:

> One is discursive, the "symptomal reading" of the ideological text, bringing about the "deconstruction" of the spontaneous experience of its meaning – that is, demonstrating how a given ideological field is a result of a montage of heterogeneous "floating signifiers," of their totalisation through the intervention of certain "nodal points"; the other aims at extracting the kernel of enjoyment, at articulating the way in which – beyond the field of meaning but at the same time internal to it – an ideology implies, manipulates, produces a pre-ideological enjoyment structured in fantasy.[99]

The interpretation of symptoms. The symptomatic gap between the imaginary content of a political demand and its symbolic form – the imaginary misrecognition by the agent of a contingent articulation of ideological elements – is the opening for a dialectics of identification. Acceptance of the contingency of identifications is central to this conception of the rearticulation of identity through collective identification – political agencies are *constructed* ideologically and not political representations of an extra-discursive necessity. This is the familiar terrain of radical democratic alliance politics: the strategy of multiple struggles for cultural recognition, political liberties and economic democratisation. The democratic socialist task is to construct new master signifiers capable of welding together the "rainbow coalition" in specifically anti-capitalist struggle.

Traversal of the fantasy. The performative contradiction inherent in democratic politics – the split between the neutral universality of the statement and its partisan, particular position of enunciation – makes it necessary for any project of

97. Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-37.

98. See Robert Miklitsch, "Flesh for Fantasy," in Geoff Boucher *et al.*, *Critical Essays on Slavoj Zizek*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-71.

99. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

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universal emancipation to undertake the traversal of the fantasy. The partisan position of enunciation, as something in excess of the statement of the universal, indicates a dimension beyond hegemonic struggle, implying that every partial demand is potentially laden with a utopian desire for the transformation of political space. But this position of enunciation is inconsistent, for it indicates an unconditional demand that transcends the frame of the nation state. Nonetheless, traversal of the fantasy is not a question of "swapping" one fantasy (for instance, nationalism) for another (for instance, communism). Instead, it involves the progressive emptying, and therefore universalisation, of the position of enunciation, through a reconfiguration of the subject's relation to utopia: the fantasy of social harmony is abandoned; political utopias become regulative goals and not social blueprints. A specifically ethical strategy, in Kantian terms, this involves an infinite striving towards a universal emancipation. This is equivalent to the Lacanian stance of "not giving way on one's desire," as persistence in the struggle for liberation, despite the radical renunciation of utopianism.

Zizek's postulate that the undivided subject can be accessed for a foundational act is symptomatic of a reluctance to accept the limitations of finitude. Accordingly, he introduces another tactic, that of "identification with the *sinthome*," a third stage that is effectively the double negation of the starting point in symptomatic analysis: "In the last stage . . . the entire perspective is reversed: we have to identify precisely with the particular form of our enjoyment."[100] Sometimes, this means only an innocuous New Left politics of sympathetic identification with the group whose exclusion sustains the dominant ideology.[101] But in Zizek's Cartesian manifesto, it describes the process whereby the subject is reduced to the Real of the death drive – that is, the metaphysical moment where the identical subject-object is induced to perform a Revolutionary Act of social inauguration. Under these conditions, it follows ineluctably from Zizek's postulates that "identification with the *sinthome*" involves a step beyond sociality. The consequence would not be subjective realignment, but psychosis.

In Lacanian terms, advocacy of these "two tactics" is equivalent to the shift from alienation (either liberalism or fundamentalism) to separation: an ethico-political strategy that is *neither* a reformist, anti-utopian gradualism, *nor* a catastrophic, proletarian chiliasm. Zizek particularly objects to the Kantian conception of regulative goals, however, which he regards as a form of cynical manipulation designed to screen a transcendental injunction against revolutionary transformation. But this radically misrecognises the Kantian argument about practical reason, which does not rule out political action, only, in line with human finitude, moral perfection. In post-Althusserian terms, the persistence of utopia means an insistence on the permanence of ideology. Indeed, from a post-Althusserian perspective, it is crucial to avoid the characteristic postmarxian mistake of

100. Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
101. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

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reducing politics and economics to ideological struggles. Political subjectivity is constituted through ideological struggle (and here, an ethical conception of democratic socialism is crucial), but politics is ultimately the field of class conflict and state power. The individual appears on political terrain as a member of a group and, instead of "constituting" this field, only intervenes within a network of structural constraints. In this connection, the socialist tradition speaks not of foundational acts (a *bourgeois* fantasy), but of the problems of the protracted transition from capitalism to post-revolutionary society. Rather than conversion to a theological materialism, then, linked to the messianic demand that followers become "undead" saints, I suggest that leftwing politics seek to construct new progressive identifications, coupled with a reconfiguration of the subject's relation to ideological utopias in general.

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Ethical Socialism? No, Thanks!

Slavoj Zizek

The first thing that strikes the eye in Boucher's text is its unabashed Kantianism, rarely encountered among psychoanalytically oriented social critics. His main reproach to me can be condensed into the accusation that I commit myself to a pre-critical "transcendental illusion" of applying a regulative idea directly to reality, with the expected political consequence of sustaining messianic terrorism (the link between the illegitimate step into the noumenal and political terror is also already critically established in Kant). The list is familiar to everyone acquainted with Kant, and, especially, the Kantian critique of German Idealism: I rehabilitate the Romantic idealist-obscurantist monster of "intellectual intuition," I mystify the Lacanian divided subject into the self-identical absolute subject-object, I regress into the pre-critical metaphysics which claims to deal directly with the noumenal dimension of the Thing-in-itself. . . . The first confusion here is that Boucher is not clear with regard to the key question: does he accept Kant's critique of the post-Kantian German Idealism (Fichte-Schelling-Hegel) as an illegitimate regression to metaphysics, or is he solidary with the move "from Kant to Hegel"? My claim (which I will try to prove) is that, in spite of his occasional lip service to Hegel and the Hegelian dialectics, his basic coordinates remain firmly Kantian. Suffice it to recall that the notions he discovers and criticizes in my work (intellectual intuition, the identical subject-object, etc.) are not the notions of pre-Kantian metaphysics, but the central notions of German Idealism.

It would be boring to enumerate factual inaccuracies in Boucher's rendering of my position – for example, the only place I deal in detail with intellectual intuition is Chapter 1 of my *Tarrying With the Negative*, where I assert Hegel's solidarity with Kant *against* this notion! Let me rather pass directly to the central reproach: WHICH, then, is this "regulative idea" that, in an illegitimate way, I directly apply to reality? Surprise, surprise: none other than the Freudian death drive! This Boucher's premise is so weird that it is worth quoting:

"In unconscious thought, the subject constructs fantasies, which bring it into contact with "object-causes of desire." But these objects are known in psychoanalysis as "partial objects" – Lacan specifies a list that includes breast, faeces, gaze, phallus and voice – and there is no "ultimate object" that brings all of these partial objects together. The unconscious is therefore "decentred": a "montage" of competing drives, the unconscious has suffered, from the moment of its inception, the loss of that object (the "maternal Thing") that would reassemble this

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pulsing plurality into a unified and harmonious "body and soul." It follows that reference to the "death drive" as the "Real of enjoyment" must be understood as a merely regulative totalisation of these heterogeneous drives."

This point may seem marginal, but it is already here, in this apparently technical description, that things go wrong: in an underhand way, Boucher introduces a tension between the multitude of "actually existing" drives, attached to different partial objects, and the "regulative idea" of a "pure" drive, the death drive linked to no partial object but directly to the incestuous Thing itself. This tension is totally foreign to Lacan – why? Since, prior to Boucher, Ernesto Laclau made exactly the same point about the alleged tension in the concept of drive between the reality of multiple partial drives and the "regulative idea" of a pure death drive, let me restate here my argument against Laclau's recent appropriation of Lacanian theory. As expected, he starts with the (highly problematic, at least) homology between the ideal of fully emancipated self-transparent Society and the fullness of the maternal Thing (the old story of how "revolutionaries who endeavor to establish a perfect society want to return to the safety of the incestuous maternal Thing") – since this fullness "is mythical, the actual search for it would only lead to destruction, were it not for the fact: (1) 'that there is no single, complete drive, only partial drives, and thus *no realizable will to destruction*; and (2) that the drive inhibits, as part of its very activity, the achievement of its aim. Some inherent obstacle – the *object* of the drive – simultaneously brakes the drive and *breaks it up*, thus preventing it from reaching its aim, and divides it into partial drives.' The drives, then, content themselves with these partial objects Lacan calls objects *a*."[1]

The misreadings in this passage start with Laclau confusing "death drive" with the so-called "*nirvana* principle," the trust toward destruction or self-obliteration: the Freudian death drive has nothing whatsoever to do with the craving for self-annihilation, for the return to the inorganic absence of any life-tension; it is, on the contrary, the very opposite of dying — a name for the "undead" eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain. The paradox of the Freudian "death drive" is therefore that it is Freud's name for its very opposite, for the way immortality appears within psychoanalysis, for an uncanny excess of life, for an "undead" urge which persist beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of generation and corruption. The ultimate lesson of psychoanalysis is that human life is never "just life": humans are not simply alive, they are possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life in excess, passionately attached to a surplus which sticks out and derails the ordinary run of things.

Consequently, it is strictly *wrong* to claim that the "pure" death drive would have been the impossible "total" will to (self)destruction, the ecstatic self-annihilation in which the subject would have rejoined the fullness of the maternal

1. Ernesto Laclau, "The Populist Reason," in *Umbr(a)* 2004, p. 45.

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Thing, and that, for this reason, it cannot ever be actualized, that it always gets blocked, stuck to a "partial object." Such a notion retranslates death drive into the terms of desire and its lost object: it is in desire that the positive object is a metonymic stand-in for the void of the impossible Thing; it is in desire that "the aspiration to fullness or wholeness is transferred to partial objects" – this is what Lacan called the metonymy of desire. One has to be very precise here if we are not to miss Lacan's point (and thereby confuse desire and drive): drive is not an infinite longing for the Thing which gets fixated onto a partial object – "drive" is this fixation itself in which resides the "death" dimension of every drive. Drive is not a universal thrust (toward the incestuous Thing) braked and broken up, it is this brake itself, a brake on instinct, its "stuckness," as Eric Santner would have put it. The elementary matrix of drive is that of transcending all particular objects toward the void of the Thing (which is then accessible only in its metonymic stand-in), but that of our libido getting "stuck" onto a particular object, condemned to circulate around it forever. The basic paradox here is that the specifically human dimension – drive as opposed to instinct — emerges precisely when what was originally a mere by-product is elevated into an autonomous aim: man is not more "reflexive"; on the contrary, man perceives as a direct goal what, for an animal, has no intrinsic value. In short, the zero-degree of "humanization" is not a further "mediation" of animal activity, its re-inscription as a subordinated moment of a higher totality (say, we eat and procreate in order to develop higher spiritual potentials), but the radical narrowing of focus, the elevation of a minor activity into an end-in-itself. We become "humans" when we get caught into a closed, self-propelling loop of repeating the same gesture and finding satisfaction in it. We all recall one of the archetypal scenes from cartoons: while dancing, the cat jumps up into the air and turns around its own axis; however, instead of falling back down towards the earth's surface in accordance with the normal laws of gravity, it remains for some time suspended in the air, turning around in the levitated position as if caught in a loop of time, repeating the same circular movement on and on. (One also finds the same shot in some musical comedies which make use of the elements of slapstick: when dancers turn around themselves in the air, they remain up there a little bit too long, as if, for a short period of time, they succeeded in suspending the law of gravity. And, effectively, is such an effect not the ultimate goal of the art of dancing?) In such moments, the "normal" run of things, the "normal" process of being caught in the imbecilic inertia of material reality, is for a brief moment suspended; we enter the magical domain of a suspended animation, of a kind of ethereal rotation which, as it were, sustains itself, hanging in the air like Baron Munchhausen who raised himself from the swamp by grabbing his own hair and pulling himself up. This rotary movement, in which the lineral progress of time is suspended in a repetitive loop, is drive at its most elementary. This, again, is "humanization" at its zero-level: this self-propelling loop which suspends/disrupts linear temporal enchainment.

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Consequently, the concept of drive makes the alternative "either burned by the Thing or maintaining a distance" false: in a drive, the "thing itself" is a circulation around the void (or, rather, hole, not void). To put it even more pointedly, the object of drive is not related to Thing as a filler of its void: drive is literally a counter-movement to desire, it does not strive toward impossible fullness and, being forced to renounce it, gets stuck onto a partial object as its remainder – drive is quite literally the very "drive" to break the All of continuity in which we are embedded, to introduce a radical imbalance into it, and the difference between drive and desire is precisely that, in desire, this cut, this fixation onto a partial object, is as it were "transcendentalized," transposed into a stand-in for the void of the Thing.

And my second critical point is that this passage from the logic of desire to the logic of drive is homologous to the passage from Kant to Hegel. That is to say, what lurks in the background of Boucher's polemical remarks against my regression to pre-critical metaphysics is the old problem of the passage from Kant (the philosopher of antinomies) to Hegel (the philosopher of dialectical contradictions); *grosso modo*, there are two versions of this passage:

(1) the first one, Kantian, to which Boucher implicitly subscribes: Kant asserts the irreducible gap of finitude, the negative access to the Noumenal (via Sublime) as the only possible for us, while Hegel's absolute idealism closes the Kantian gap and returns us to pre-critical metaphysics;

(2) the second one, to which I subscribe: it is Kant who goes only half the way in his destruction of metaphysics, still maintaining the reference to the Thing-in-itself as an external inaccessible entity, and Hegel is merely a radicalized Kant who accomplishes the step from negative access to the Absolute to Absolute itself as negativity.

Since this point is philosophically crucial, let me elaborate on it more in detail. Perhaps the best way to describe the Kantian break is with regard to the changed status of the notion of the "inhuman." Kant introduced a key distinction between negative and indefinite judgment: the positive judgment "the soul is mortal" can be negated in two ways, when a predicate is denied to the subject ("the soul is not mortal"), and when a non-predicate is affirmed ("the soul is non-mortal") – the difference is exactly the same as the one known to every reader of Stephen King, between "he is not dead" and "he is un-dead." The indefinite judgment opens up a third domain which undermines the underlying distinction: the "undead" are neither alive nor dead, they are precisely the monstrous "living dead."[2] And the same goes for "inhuman": "he is not human" is not the same as "he is inhuman": "he is not human" means simply that he is external to humanity, animal or divine, while "he is inhuman" means something thoroughly difference, namely the fact that he is neither human nor inhuman, but marked by a terrifying

2. For a closer elaboration of this distinction, see Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying With the Negative*, ch. 3 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

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excess which, although it negates what we understand as "humanity," is inherent to being-human. And perhaps one should risk the hypothesis that this is what changes with the Kantian revolution: in the pre-Kantian universe, humans were simply humans, beings of reason, fighting the excesses of animal lusts and divine madness, while only with Kant and German Idealism, the excess to be fought is absolutely immanent, the very core of subjectivity itself (which is why, with German Idealism, the metaphor for the core of subjectivity is Night, "Night of the World," in contrast to the Enlightenment notion of the Light of Reason fighting the darkness around). So when, in the pre-Kantian universe, a hero goes mad, it means he is deprived of his humanity, i.e., the animal passions or divine madness took over, while with Kant, madness signals the unconstrained explosion of the very core of a human being.

Which, then, is this new dimension that emerges in the gap itself? It is that of the transcendental I, of its "spontaneity": the ultimate parallax, the third space between phenomena and noumenon itself, is the subject's freedom/spontaneity, which – although not the property of a phenomenal entity, and hence it cannot be dismissed as a false appearance which conceals the noumenal fact that we are totally caught in an inaccessible necessity — is also not simply noumenal. In a mysterious subchapter of his *Critique of Practical Reason* entitled "Of the Wise Adaptation of Man's Cognitive Faculties to His Practical Vocation," Kant endeavors to answer the question of what would happen to us if we were to gain access to the noumenal domain, to the *Ding an sich*: "instead of the conflict which now the moral disposition has to wage with inclinations and in which, after some defeats, moral strength of mind may be gradually won, God and eternity in their awful majesty would stand unceasingly before our eyes. Thus most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, few would be done from hope, none from duty. The moral worth of actions, on which alone the worth of the person and even of the world depends in the eyes of supreme wisdom, would not exist at all. The conduct of man, so long as his nature remained as it is now, would be changed into mere mechanism, where, as in a puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures."[3]

In short, the direct access to the noumenal domain would deprive us of the very "spontaneity" which forms the kernel of transcendental freedom: it would turn us into lifeless automata, or, to put it in today's terms, into "thinking machines." The implication of this passage is much more radical and paradoxical than it may appear. If we discard its inconsistency (how could fear and lifeless gesticulation coexist?), the conclusion it imposes is that, at the level of phenomena as well as at the noumenal level, we humans are a "mere mechanism" with no autonomy and freedom: as phenomena, we are not free, we are a part of nature, a "mere mechanism," totally submitted to causal links, a part of the nexus of

3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 152-153.

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causes and effects, and as noumena, we are again not free, but reduced to a "mere mechanism." (Is what Kant describes as a person which directly knows the noumenal domain not strictly homologous to the utilitarian subject whose acts are fully determined by the calculus of pleasures and pains?) *Our freedom persists only in a space IN BETWEEN the phenomenal and the noumenal.* It is therefore not that Kant simply limited causality to the phenomenal domain in order to be able to assert that, at the noumenal level, we are free autonomous agents: we are only free insofar as our horizon is that of the phenomenal, insofar as the noumenal domain remains inaccessible to us. Is the way out of this predicament to assert that we are free insofar as we ARE noumenally autonomous, BUT our cognitive perspective remains constrained to the phenomenal level? In this case, we ARE "really free" at the noumenal level, but our freedom would be meaningless if we were also to have the cognitive insight into the noumenal domain, since that insight would always determine our choices — who WOULD choose evil, when confronted with the fact that the price of doing evil will be the divine punishment? However, does this imagined case not provide us with the only consequent answer to the question "what would a truly free act be," a free act for a noumenal entity, an act of true *noumenal* freedom? It would be to KNOW all the inexorable horrible consequences of choosing the evil, *and nonetheless to choose it.* This would have been a truly "non-pathological" act, an act of acting with no regard for one's pathological interests. . . . Kant's own formulations are here misleading, since he often identifies the transcendental subject with the noumenal I, whose phenomenal appearance is the empirical "person," thus shirking from his radical insight into how the transcendental subject is a pure formal-structural function beyond the opposition of the noumenal and the phenomenal.

Crucial is thus the shift of the place of freedom from the noumenal beyond to the very gap between phenomenal and noumenal – and this brings us back to the complex relationship between Kant and Hegel. Is this shift not the very shift from Kant to Hegel, from the tension between immanence and transcendence to the minimal difference/gap in the immanence itself? Hegel is thus not external to Kant: the problem with Kant was that he produced the shift but was not able, for structural reasons, to formulate it explicitly – he "knew" that the place of freedom is effectively not noumenal, but the gap between phenomenal and noumenal, but could not put it so explicitly, since, if he were to do it, his transcendental edifice would have collapsed. However, WITHOUT this implicit "knowledge," there would also have been no transcendental dimension, so that one is forced to conclude that, far from being a stable consistent position, the dimension of the Kantian "transcendental" can only sustain itself in a fragile balance between the said and the unsaid, through producing something the full consequences of which we refuse to articulate, to "posit as such." (The same goes, say, for the fact that, in the Kantian dialectic of the Sublime, there is no positive Beyond whose phenomenal representation fails: there is nothing "beyond," the "Beyond" is only the

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void of the impossibility/failure of its own representation — or, as Hegel put it at the end of the chapter on consciousness in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, beyond the veil of the phenomena, the consciousness only finds what it itself has put there. Again, Kant "knew it" without being able to consistently formulate it.)

Recall Claude Lévi-Strauss' exemplary analysis, from his *Structural Anthropology*, of the spatial disposition of buildings in the Winnebago, one of the Great Lake tribes, might be of some help here. The tribe is divided into two sub-groups ("moieties"), "those who are from above" and "those who are from below"; when we ask an individual to draw on a piece of paper, or on sand, the ground-plan of his/her village (the spatial disposition of cottages), we obtain two quite different answers, depending on his/her belonging to one or the other sub-group. Both perceive the village as a circle; but for one sub-group, there is within this circle another circle of central houses, so that we have two concentric circles, while for the other sub-group, the circle is split into two by a clear dividing line. In other words, a member of the first sub-group (let us call it "conservative-corporatist") perceives the ground-plan of the village as a ring of houses more or less symmetrically disposed around the central temple, whereas a member of the second ("revolutionary-antagonistic") sub-group perceives the village as two distinct heaps of houses separated by an invisible frontier.[4] The point Lévi-Strauss wants to make is that this example should in no way entice us into cultural relativism, according to which the perception of social space depends on the observer's group-belonging: the very splitting into the two "relative" perceptions implies a hidden reference to a constant — not the objective, "actual" disposition of buildings but a traumatic kernel, a fundamental antagonism the inhabitants of the village were unable to symbolize, to account for, to "internalize," to come to terms with, an imbalance in social relations that prevented the community from stabilizing itself into a harmonious whole. The two perceptions of the ground-plan are simply two mutually exclusive endeavors to cope with this traumatic antagonism, to heal its wound via the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure. It is here that one can see in what precise sense the Real intervenes through anamorphosis. We have first the "actual," "objective," arrangement of the houses, and then its two different symbolizations, which both distort in an anamorphic way the actual arrangement. However, the "real" is here not the actual arrangement, but the traumatic core of the social antagonism, which distorts the tribe members' view of the actual antagonism.

The Real is thus a transcendent Thong, a disavowed X on account of which our vision of reality is always anamorphically distorted; it is simultaneoulsy the Thing to which direct access is not possible AND the obstacle which prevents this direct access, the Thing which eludes our grasp AND the distorting screen which makes us miss the Thing. More precisely, the Real is ultimately the very shift of

4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Do Dual Organizations Exist?" in *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 131-163; the drawings are on pp. 133-134.

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perspective from the first to the second standpoint. Recall Adorno's old and well-known analysis of the antagonistic character of the notion of society: in a first approach, the split between the two notions of society (Anglo-Saxon individualistic-nominalistic and Durkheimian organicist notion of society as a totality which preexists individuals) seems irreducible, we seem to be dealing with a true Kantian antinomy which cannot be resolved via a higher "dialectical synthesis," and which elevates society into an inaccessible Thing-in-itself; however, in a second approach, one should merely take not of how this radical antinomy which seems to preclude our access to the Thing ALREADY IS THE THING ITSELF – the fundamental feature of today's society IS the irreconciliable antagonism between Totality and the individual.

What all this amounts to with regard to Boucher is that, in his conceptual space, there is simply no place for the Hegelian overcoming the Kantian tension between phenomenal reality and the inaccessible noumenal Thing: although he concedes that Hegel can be "saved," his move from Kant is ultimately disqualified as a regression into pre-critical metaphysics. Boucher writes: "Indeed, Zizek's endorsement of an identical subject-object always seemed a surprisingly inconsistent position, considering that it was Zizek who proposed to replace dialectics as pre-critical metaphysics – the slide into transcendental illusion – with a Lacanian, post-critical dialectics. 'Saving' Hegel through Lacan meant not only repudiating teleology, but also rejecting the mirage of the noumenal thing-in-itself – instead of a dialectics 'in the Real,' Zizek proposed a Hegelian logic of the signifier. Such logic is entirely opposed to the metaphysics of the identical subject-object, leading to the conclusion that Zizek's 'Pauline materialism' represents regression from Lacanian dialectics to pre-critical metaphysics."

The ambiguity of these statements cannot but strike the eye: to what does "dialectics as pre-critical metaphysics" refer? To pre-Kantian metaphysics or to Hegel? Where is Hegel in this opposition between "bad" metaphysics, caught in the "mirage of the noumenal thing-in-itself," and "good" dialectics? The dialectically-mediated identity of subject and object is the basic premise of Hegelian thought!

In a typically Kantian way, Boucher (who otherwise repeatedly accuses me of conflating together crucial differences) is thus forced to confound a whole series of key distinctions in my work. Exemplarily, according to Boucher, my notion of the subject, "with its elimination of division and decentering, implies an identity of thinking and being, a re-substantivized *cogito*" – this after I have spent literally hundreds of pages explaining how the Real is not a substantial entity ("Thing"), but a purely formal gap or inconsistency. To put it succinctly, what is for me "beyond divided subject" is not a self-identical subject-substance, but the subject as a name for division/gap itself. See also the following, truly breath-taking, passage: "Discursive formations are therefore relatively stable, because they are supported by a kernel of enjoyment, structured by an unconscious fantasy, which Zizek connects with the repressed 'political Act'/

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'national Thing'/'the Political.' On the other hand, the Political/Act/Thing, the 'kernel of the Real,' has exclusively sinister connotations, because Zizek aligns it with bureaucratic idiocy, illegal transgressions, racist enjoyment, patriarchal sexism, and so forth."

Obviously, Boucher has a big problem with where to put his hand: the "Political/Act/Thing" is a thoroughly meaningless condensation, conflating two totally different dimensions, that of the fantasies (the domain of "bureaucratic idiocy, illegal transgressions, racist enjoyment, patriarchal sexism, and so forth"), and that of the act which, precisely, is the act of "traversing" the fantasy! This brings us to Boucher's second line of attack, which concerns the political consequences (or, rather, aspect) of my alleged "regression" to precritical metaphysics: first, my antinomic oscillation with regard to the relationship between the Law and its obscene supplement; then, my alleged advocacy of the messianic violence of a radical Act as the political counterpart of the regression to the precritical contact with the noumenal Thing. Here is his description of the "antinomy governing Zizek's theory": "on the one hand, the Real is only the 'inherent transgression' of the Symbolic, and so we should cleave to the symbolic field (Zizek often enjoins us to 'stick to the letter of the law'), by rejecting the allure of superego enjoyment. On the other hand, however, the symbolic field is nothing but a ruse, secretly supported by an obscene enjoyment that in actuality reigns supreme."

This alternative itself is false: again, both hands are here Boucher's. What I advocate is NEITHER the reduction of the obscene underside of the Law to its secondary "safety valve" to be rejected in the pursuit of a more adequate symbolic law, NOR a substantial Real which effectively "runs the show" and devalues the public Law into an impotent theater of shadows. The obscene underside, of course, is the supplement of a Law, ITS shadowy double, ITS "inherent transgression"; it is not merely a secondary "safety valve," but an active SUPPORT of the public Law – not a tolerated pseudo-excess, but a SOLLICITED excess. For this very reason, it functions as a Lacanian *sinthome*: a knot which literally holds together the Law – you dissolve the excess, and you lose the Law itself whose excess it is.

Let me explain this via a reference to "Humoresque," arguably Schumann's piano masterpiece, which is to be read against the background of the gradual loss of the voice in his songs: it is not a simple piano piece, but a song without the vocal line, with the vocal line reduced to silence, so that all we effectively hear is the piano accompaniment. This is how one should read the famous "inner voice [*innere Stimme*]" added by Schumann (in the written score) as a third line between the two piano lines, higher and lower: as the vocal melodic line which remains a non-vocalized "inner voice," a kind of musical equivalent to the Heidegger-Derridean "crossed-out" Being. What we actually hear is thus a "variation, but not on a theme," a series of variations without the theme, accompaniment without the main melodic line (which exists only as *Augenmusik*, music for

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the eyes only, in the guise of written notes). This absent melody is to be reconstructed on the basis of the fact that the first and third levels (the right and the left hand piano lines) do not relate to each other directly, i.e., their relationship is not that of an immediate mirroring: in order to account for their interconnection, one is thus compelled to (re)construct a third, "virtual" intermediate level (melodic line) which, for structural reasons, cannot be played. Its status is that of an impossible-real which can exist only in the guise of a writing, i.e., physical presence would annihilate the two melodic lines we effectively hear in reality (as in Freud's "A child is being beaten," in which the middle fantasy scene was never conscious and has to be reconstructed as the missing link between the first and the last scene). Schumann brings this procedure of absent melody to an apparently absurd self-reference when, later in the same fragment of "Humoresque," he repeats the same two effectively played melodic lines, yet this time the score contains no third absent melodic line, no inner voice — what is absent here is the absent melody, i.e., absence itself. The true pianist should thus have the *savoir-faire* to play the existing, positive, notes in such a way that one would be capable of discerning the echo of the accompanying non-played "silent" virtual notes or their absence. . . and is this not how ideology works? The explicit ideological text (or practice) is sustained by the "unplayed" series of obscene superego supplement. In Really Existing Socialism, the explicit ideology of socialist democracy was sustained by a set of implicit (unspoken) obscene injunctions and prohibitions, teaching the subject how not to take some explicit norms seriously and how to implement a set of publicly unacknowledged prohibitions. One of the strategies of dissidence in the last years of Socialism was therefore precisely to take the ruling ideology more seriously/literally than it took itself by way of ignoring its virtual unwritten shadow: "You want us to practice socialist democracy? OK, here you have it!" And when one got back from the Party apparatchiks desperate hints of how this is not the way things function, one simply had to ignore these hints. . . . This is what happens with the proclamation of the Decalogue: its revolutionary novelty resides not in its content, but in the absence of the accompanying virtual texture of the Law's obscene supplement. This is what "*acheronta movebo*" as a practice of the critique of ideology means: not directly changing the explicit text of the Law, but, rather, intervening into its obscene virtual supplement. Recall the relationship toward homosexuality in a soldiers' community, which operates at two clearly distinct levels: the explicit homosexuality is brutally attacked, those identified as gays are ostracized, beaten up every night, etc.; however, this explicit homophobia is accompanied by an excessive set of implicit web of homosexual innuendos, inner jokes, obscene practices, etc. The truly radical intervention into military homophobia should therefore not focus primarily on the explicit repression of homosexuality; it should rather "move the underground," disturb the implicit homosexual practices, which sustain the explicit homophobia.

Here we can see how Boucher's alternative is wrong: the true choice is not

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between sticking to the universality of the symbolic Law, trying to purify it of its obscene supplements (vaguely a Habermasian option), and between dismissing this very universal dimension as a theatre of shadows dominated by the Real of obscene fantasies. *The true act is to intervene into this obscene underground domain, transforming it.*

No wonder, then, that Boucher's Kantianism asserts itself with a vengeance here: what he proposes is the "non-utopian" notion of the Symbolic Law as structurally equivalent to Kant's moral Law, i.e., as a pure form with regard to which all particular maxims and rules, stained with "pathological" fantasmatic content, fall short. And, in a typical Kantian way, the ultimate support of emancipatory activity can only be this gap between the pure Law and empirical laws: "It is precisely the gap between the Moral Law and every legal code that makes it possible for the subject to adopt a critical position towards authority." What this means is that, in what I am mischievously tempted to call "Boucher's antinomy," one can neither get rid of the obscene fantasmatic dimension, nor should one simply endorse the replacement of one with another fantasy – since the "pathological" dimension is for us, finite humans, irreducible, one should keep the goal of a pure Law, but only as a "regulative idea." One should stick to the notion of a universal symbolic rights, deprived of their "pathological" bias, stains of fantasmatic enjoyment, but, simultaneously, one should be aware that this is an inaccessible ideal, a "regulative idea" that can only be asymptotically approached – if we want to realize it directly, we end up in a totalitarian nightmare: "Nonetheless, traversal of the fantasy is not a question of 'swapping' one fantasy (for instance, nationalism) for another (for instance, communism). Instead, it involves the progressive emptying, and therefore universalisation, of the position of enunciation, through a reconfiguration of the subject's relation to utopia: the fantasy of social harmony is abandoned; political utopias become regulative goals and not social blueprints. A specifically ethical strategy, in Kantian terms, this involves an infinite striving towards a universal emancipation. This is equivalent to the Lacanian stance of 'not giving way on one's desire,' as persistence in the struggle for liberation, despite the radical renunciation of utopianism."

The simplicity of these statements is, again, breathtaking: what strikes the eye is the totally naïve, pre-Freudian, notion of fantasy at work here – fantasy is simply reduced to the "fantasy of social harmony," the notion of an ideal society deprived of antagonistic tensions, which has nothing whatsoever to do with what psychoanalysis calls fantasy! And to identify Lacan's *ne pas céder sur son désir* with the Kantian infinite struggle for the ethical Ideal really goes over the board! Lacan develops this maxim of psychoanalytic ethics apropos Antigone – she is the one who "did not give way on her desire," not only with no reference whatsoever to approaching some infinite Ideal, but in clear contrast to it. Antigone, very "dogmatically," stuck to a specific maxim (the proper burial of her brother), elevating it to the level of the unconditional Law – in other words, she did precisely

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what Boucher prohibits: she collapsed the difference between the "pure" Law and a specific maxim! THIS is what Lacan aimed at with *ne pas céder sur son désir.*

If we apply the notion of fantasy in a more strict way, and if we effectively want to break out of the Kantian problematic of asymptotically approaching an ethical Ideal, then one should raise another key question here: WHY reject the "'swapping' one fantasy (for instance, nationalism) for another (for instance, communism)"? Why not accept the need to articulate NEW fantasmatic spaces? Recently, Lorenzo Chiesa[5] forcefully confronted this problem: should we stick to the revolutionary dream of a society which would leave behind the tension between the public Law and its fantasmatic support (obscene superego supplement), or is this tension irreducible? If it is irreducible, how are we to avoid the resigned conservative conclusion that every revolutionary upheaval has to end up in a new version of the positive order which reproduces itself through its obscene inherent transgression? The lesson of history seems to confirm the inevitability of this relapse. It was only a couple of times that political regimes tried to fill in this tension, most notably in the Spartan state which represents a uniquely pure realization of a certain model of societal organization. Its three caste pyramid of social hierarchy (the ruling warrior *homoi* (the "equals"), the artisans and merchants below them, and the mass of helots at the bottom who were just slaves exploited for physical labor) condenses in a crystal-like way the historical succession of serfdom, capitalism and egalitarian communism: in a way, Sparta was all the three at the same time, a feudalism for the lowest class, capitalism for the middle class, and communism for the ruling class. The ethico-ideological paradoxes of the rulers are of special interest here: in spite of the absolute power they enjoy, they had to live not only in a permanent state of emergency, in war with their own subjects, but also as if their own position is obscene and illegal. Say, while in military training, the adolescents are on purpose given insufficient food, so they have to steal it; however, if they are caught, they are severely punished – not for stealing it, but for getting caught, thus being pushed into learning the art of secret stealing. Or, with regard to marriage: the married soldier continues to live together with his fellows in military barracks, he can only visit his wife secretly during the night, as if committing a secret act of transgression. The highest case of this twisted logic is the key ordeal of young trainees: in order to earn their acceptance into masculine society, they have to murder secretly one of the unsuspecting helots — in the ruling class, the transgression and the law thus directly coincide. Is this not a kind of perverse realization of Hegel's notion of three estates of a rational state (the "substantial" peasants living in the universe of immediate mores, the dynamic artisans and industrialists run by their egotistic individual interest, the state bureaucracy as the universal class), with a curious twist: the universality of the "universal class" of homoi is self-negating, in full

5. See Lorenzo Chiesa, "Imaginary, Symbolic and Real Otherness: The Lacanian Subject and His Vicissitudes," thesis, University of Warwick, Dept of Philosophy, 2004.

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conflict with itself — instead of peaceful universality, they live in the permanent unrest and state of emergency. We find such a paradoxical model in which the power treats ITSELF as an illegal obscenity in other extreme "totalitarian" regimes, exemplarily in the Khmer Rouge 1975-79 regime in Kampuchea, where to inquire into the structure of state power was considered a crime: the leaders were referred to anonymously as "Brother No 1" (Pol Pot, of course), "Brother No 2," etc. The important lesson to be drawn from this extreme is that, in it, the "truth" about power AS SUCH comes to light: that it is an obscene excess (over the social body). That is to say, it would be wrong to oppose this reduction of power to the obscene excess to "pure" power which would function without any obscene support: the point is, rather, that the attempt to establish a "pure" power necessarily reverts into its opposite, a power which has to relate to itself as to an obscene excess. (And, at a different level, we encounter the same paradox in Western democratic societies in which the disappearance of the figure of the Master, far from abolishing domination, is sustained by new unheard-of forms of disavowed control and domination.)

Should we then, as Chiesa proposes, take seriously (not merely as a cynical wisdom) Lacan's claim that the discourse of the analyst prepares the way for a new Master, and heroically assume the need to pass from the negative gesture of "traversing the fantasy" to the formation of a New Order, inclusive of a new Master and its obscene superego underside? Was Lacan himself, in his very last seminars, not pointing in this direction with his motif "towards a new signifier [*vers un significant nouveau*]"? However, the question persists here: in what, *structurally*, does this new Master differ from the previous, overthrown, one (and its new fantasmatic support from the old one)? If there is no *structural* difference, then we are back at the resigned conservative wisdom about (a political) revolution as a revolution in the astronomic sense of the circular movement which brings us back to the starting point. It is only here that one can approach what I see as the real problem, beyond Boucher's false alternatives: that of a *socio-political transformation that would entail the restructuring of the entire field of the relations between the public Law and its obscene supplement*. In other words, what about the prospect of a RADICAL social transformation which would NOT involve the boring scarecrow of utopian-totalitarian "complete fullness and transparency of the social"? Why should every project of a radical social revolution automatically fall into the trap of aiming at the impossible dream of "total transparency"? Or, to go on with the celestial metaphor, does it not happen, from time to time, that a shift occurs in the very circular path of planetary revolutions, a break which redefines its coordinates and establishes a new balance, or, rather, a new measure of balance? This, however, is the topic for a text more substantial than this limited reply.

The unintended irony of Boucher's Kantian critique reaches its apogee when, in his opposition between "good" (early) Zizek and the "bad" (late messianic, etc.) Zizek, he "kantianizes" my own earlier positions. When he writes that "Zizek's effort to create an emancipatory politics capable of breaking through the

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contemporary pseudo-dialectic of cynicism and violence leads him to declare himself a "Pauline materialist," or ethical Marxist," or when he approvingly renders my early notion (before I "regressed" to noumenal-messianic madness) of the subject as "the lynchpin of political resistance and the basis for an ethical conception of socialism," I cannot but rub my eyes in disbelief: WHERE did I declare myself an "ethical Marxist" or advocate an "ethical conception of socialism"? More generally, what cannot but act as a surprise in someone who proclaims his interest in the renovation of Marxism is the flatness, the commonplace character, of the "good" position that Boucher opposes to my "messianic" radicalism: "Rather than conversion to a theological materialism, then, linked to the messianic demand that followers become 'undead' saints, I suggest that leftwing politics seek to construct new progressive identifications, coupled with a reconfiguration of the subject's relation to ideological utopias in general." We are thus effectively back at the "familiar terrain of radical democratic alliance politics: the strategy of multiple struggles for cultural recognition, political liberties and economic democratization. The democratic socialist task is to construct new master signifiers capable of welding together the 'rainbow coalition' in specifically anti-capitalist struggle." Is this not a postmodern mantra we are being bombarded with for over two decades, with no tangible results? The way I read our predicament today, in what the big media refer to as the "post-9/11 world," is that we witness precisely the failure of the "postmodern" Left with its *topoi* of the "rainbow coalition" between multiple contingent local identities. The rise of populist fundamentalism is, in my view, a kind of "revenge of history" for this failure.

What makes a theoretico-political position suspicious is when it defines itself against a caricatural non-existing enemy – and this is what, I think, is the case with Boucher: reading him, one gets the impression that the big struggle within the Left today is between the postmodern post-utopian politics of forming "rainbow coalition" flexible alliances, and the old "essentialist" proto-totalitarian class struggle. But where IS today this much-maligned "messianic" class struggle politics? Where ARE those proto-Stalinists "essentialists" we should fear? It is significant that the predominant form of today's Left, the Third Way social democracy, is not even mentioned by Boucher.

As to the "rainbow coalition" motif, the first thing to take not of is the fundamental difference between feminist/anti-racist/anti-sexist etc. struggle and class struggle: in the first case, the goal is to translate antagonism into difference ("peaceful" coexistence of sexes, religions, ethnic groups), while the goal of the class struggle is precisely the opposite, i.e., to "aggravate" class difference into class antagonism. So what the series race-gender-class obfuscates is the different logic of the political space in the case of class: while the anti-racist and anti-sexist struggle are guided by the striving for the full recognition of the other, the class struggle aims at overcoming and subduing, annihilating even, the other – even if not a direct physical annihilation, class struggle aims at the annihilation of

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the other's socio-political role and function. In other words, while it is logical to say that anti-racism wants all races to be allowed to freely assert and deploy their cultural, political and economic strivings, it is obviously meaningless to say that the aim of the proletarian class struggle is to allow the bourgeoisie to fully assert its identity and strivings. . . . In one case, we have a "horizontal" logic of the recognition of different identities, while, in the other case, we have the logic of the struggle with an antagonist. The paradox here is that it is the populist fundamentalism which retains this logic of antagonism, while the liberal Left follows the logic of recognition of differences, of "defusing" antagonisms into co-existing differences: in their very form, the conservative-populist grass-roots campaigns took over the old Leftist-radical stance of the popular mobilization and struggle against upper-class exploitation. Insofar as, in the present US two-parties system, red designates Republicans and blue Democrats, and insofar as populist fundamentalists, of course, vote Republican, the old anti-Communist slogan "Better dead than red!" now acquires a new ironic meaning – the irony residing in the unexpected continuity of the "red" attitude from the old Leftist grass-root mobilization to the new Christian fundamentalist grass-root mobilization. . . .

This unexpected reversal is just one in a long series. In today's US, the traditional roles of Democrats and Republicans are almost inverted: Republicans spend state money, thus generating record budget deficit, *de facto* build a strong federal state, and pursue a politics of global interventionism, while Democrats pursue a tough fiscal politics that, under Clinton, abolished budget deficit. Even in the touchy sphere of socio-economic politics, Democrats (the same as with Blair in the UK) as a rule accomplish the neo-liberal agenda of abolishing the Welfare State, lowering taxes, privatizing, etc., while Bush proposed a radical measure of legalizing the status of the millions of illegal Mexican workers and made healthcare much more accessible to the retired. The extreme case is here that of the survivalist groups in the West of the US: although their ideological message is that of religious racism, their entire mode of organization (small illegal groups fighting FBI and other federal agencies) makes them an uncanny double of the Black Panthers from the 1960s. According to an old Marxist insight, every rise of fascism is a sign of a failed revolution – no wonder, then, that Kansas – THE state of populist fundamentalism — is also the state of John Brown, the KEY political figure in the history of US, the fervently Christian "radical abolitionist" who came closest to introducing the radical emancipatory-egalitarian logic into the US political landscape: "John Brown considered himself a complete egalitarian. And it was very important for him to practice egalitarianism on every level. African Americans were caricatures of people, they were characterized as buffoons and minstrels, they were the butt-end of jokes in American society. And even the abolitionists, as antislavery as they were, the majority of them did not see African Americans as equals. The majority of them, and this was something that African Americans complained about all the time, were willing to work for the end of sla-

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very in the South but they were not willing to work to end discrimination in the North. John Brown wasn't like that. For him, practicing egalitarianism was a first step toward ending slavery. And African Americans who came in contact with him knew this immediately. He made it very clear that he saw no difference, and he didn't make this clear by saying it, he made it clear by what he did."[6]

His consequential egalitarianism led him to get engaged in the armed struggle against slavery: in 1859, Brown and 21 other men seized the federal armory at Harper's Ferry, hoping to arm slaves and thus create a violent rebellion against the South. However, after 36 hours the revolt was suppressed and Brown was taken to jail by a federal force led by no other than Robert E. Lee. After being found guilty of murder, treason, and inciting a slave insurrection, Brown was hanged on December 2, 1859. And, today even, long after slavery was abolished, Brown is the dividing figure in American collective memory – this point was made most succinctly by Russell Banks, whose magnificent novel *Cloud-splitter* retells Brown's story: "The reason white people think he was mad is because he was a white man and he was willing to sacrifice his life in order to liberate Black Americans. Black people don't think he's crazy, generally — very few African Americans regard Brown as insane. If you go out onto the street today, whether you are speaking to a school kid or an elderly woman or a college professor, if it's an African American person you're talking to about John Brown, they are going start right out with the assumption that he was a hero because he was willing to sacrifice his life — a white man — in order to liberate Black Americans. If you speak to a white American, probably the same proportion of them will say he was a madman. And it's for the same reason, because he was a white man who was willing to sacrifice his life to liberate Black Americans. The very thing that makes him seem mad to white Americans is what makes him seem heroic to Black Americans."[7]

For this reason, those whites who support Brown are all the more precious – among them, surprisingly, Henry David Thoreau, the great opponent of violence: against the standard dismissal of Brown as blood-thirsty, foolish and insane, Thoreau[8] painted a portrait of a peerless man whose embracement of a cause was unparalleled; he even goes as far as to liken Brown's execution (he states that he regards Brown as dead before his actual death) to Christ. Thoreau vents at the scores of those who have voiced their displeasure and scorn for John Brown: the same people can't relate to Brown because of their concrete stances and "dead" existences; they are truly not living, only a handful of men have lived.

And, when talking about the Kansas populists, one should bear in mind that

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6. Margaret Washington, on http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/brown/filmmore/reference/interview/washington05.html.

7. Russell Banks, in http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/brown/filmmore/reference/interview/banks01.html.

8. See Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993).

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they also celebrate John Brown as their saint.[9] We should thus not only refuse the easy liberal contempt for the populist fundamentalists (or, even worse, the patronizing regret of how "manipulated" they are); we should reject the very terms of the culture war. Although, of course, as to the positive content of most of the debated issues, a radical Leftist should support the liberal stance (for abortion, against racism and homophobia, etc.), one should never forget that it is the populist fundamentalist, not the liberal, who is, in the long term, our ally. In all their anger, they are not radical enough to perceive the link between capitalism and the moral decay they deplore.

Reading Boucher, one cannot avoid the impression that I advocate some kind of crazy messianic politics of a radical violent Act – so, to conclude, let me formulate my position as clearly as possible, in contrast to Laclau & Mouffe and Negri & Hardt. Although opposed theoretically, they are all basically optimists, propagating an enthusiastic message: the old oppressive times of "essentialism" and centralized struggles for State power are over, we live in a new epoch in which the Left is given a chance to reinvent itself as occupying the field of multiple struggles (anti-sexist, anti-racist, ecological, civil rights, anti-globalization), new spaces of politicization and democratization of our daily lives are opening up. . . . (Negri & Hardt nonetheless hold here one advantage over Laclau & Mouffe: they at least relate to – and are part of – an effective large-scale political movement (of anti-globalization), while Laclau provides just an empty "transcendental" frame which does not echo with any determinate political movement or strategy – which is why Negri & Hardt's work also finds a much larger public.) In contrast to both of them, my stance is much more modest and – why not — pessimist: we effectively live in dark times for emancipatory politics. While one can discern the contours of the fateful limitation of the present global capitalist system, inclusive of its democratic form of political self-legitimization, while one can outline the self-destructive dynamics that propels its reproduction, and while one can perceive the insufficiency of all the forms of struggle at our disposal now, one cannot formulate a clear project of global change. So, contrary to the cheap "revolutionary" calls for a radical overthrow of capitalism and its democratic political form, my point is precisely that such calls, although necessary in the long run, are meaningless today. What I am not ready to do is, however, endorse the standard "postmodern" political solution to turn defeat into a blessing in disguise, i.e., to abandon the horizon of radical change in favor of the prospect of multiple local practices of resistance, etc. – today, it is more crucial than ever to continue to question the very foundations of capitalism as a global system, to clearly articulate the limitation of the democratic political project.

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9. Some anti-abortionists draw parallel between Brown's fight and their own: Brown acknowledged as fully human blacks, i.e., people who, for the majority, were less-than-human and as such denied basic human rights; in the same way, anti-abortionists acknowledge as fully human the unborn child.

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